

Introduction To **VINAYAK DAMODAR SAVARKAR**

RAGHUVENDRA TANWAR



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Introduction To VINAYAK DAMODAR SAVARKAR

by Dr. Raghuvendra Tanwar

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Baba Sahib Apte Smriti Bhawan, 'Keshav Kunj',
Jhandewalan, New Delhi-110 055

Ph.: 011-23675667

e-mail : abisy84@gmail.com

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PREFACE

How does one introduce someone like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar? In 1950, Dhananjay Keer, Savarkar's acclaimed biographer noted in the preface: "Swantryaveer Savarkar needs no introduction to the Indian public neither does his biography". Many prints of this fascinating study were sold out before Keer, published the second edition in October 1966. Savarkar of course was by then no more, having passed away on 26 February (1966). In the preface to the second edition, Keer added: "His life removes the wrong impression... that the Indian freedom movement started with Gandhi and Nehru". Keer also described his life as, "...romantic, epic & volcanic..."

On 28 February 1966, *The Tribune* dedicated an obituary editorial to Savarkar:

"Because of his poor health and relatively advanced age Savarkar was not much in the news in recent years. For this reason, the younger generation is not likely to know much about the heroic part played in the early years of the century to make India free... was a born revolutionary... it was such staff that India's early leaders were made of... one by one they have all gone now... the present generation of

1. Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay, 1966), Preface.

Indian's can hardly do better than cherish their memory..."

The above observations of Keer are important because a trend was no doubt initiated towards projecting a view that in the struggle for freedom some leaders alone were worthy of extended references and some needed to be forgotten. One result of this was that several men and women who had played important roles in the early years of the freedom struggle in particular, were sidelined from the pages of history. The impact of this approach which obviously was planned and designed has been hugely consequential. This was all the more because this approach to the study of India's struggle for freedom was most evident in books that were prescribed for schools and colleges by major examining boards like the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). The result of this has also been that generations of students have grown up ignorant of the role and contribution of many great men & women. A long list can be cited. But let us take one example.

The Story of Civilization was published by the NCERT in 1978 as a textbook for the Secondary schools. Its Vol. II was prescribed for class X, which in India is a key stage in a students' life. Chapter 15 in this volume is titled, 'India's Struggle for Freedom'. The chapter contains 25 references to Jawaharlal Nehru, with six photos of Nehru. The name Mahatma Gandhi appears 17 times and has two photos of Gandhi. The name Subhash Bose is mentioned six times with one photo. The name of Balgangadhar Tilak appears 3 times with no photo. The name of Vinayak Savarkar like so many others finds no mention – not even once. That mainstream history or to put it differently, what is projected to be mainstream history has been unfair and unkind to Savarkar, is something that is sought to be briefly explained in the pages that follow.

Savarkar is a name that is interwoven in the story of India's struggle for freedom, particularly the history of the great Indian revolutionary movement. Likewise, if one were to study the history of the social reform movement in

Maharashtra, Savarkar, even though was not from the same background as Mahatma Phule or Bhim Rao Ambedkar, yet he appears a part of the same chain – the same link. Throughout his life, indeed at every stage Savarkar fought against the barriers of caste and its ills. Savarkar was a complete rationalist; he condemned strongly anything that drew its cause of acceptance from superstition. He took great pride in India's historical legacy of culture, art, literature, yet, he wanted the contents of even the ancient scriptures for example, to be tested on the scales of science and rationality.

Savarkar was the first Indian to be rusticated from a government aided college, the first to set torch to foreign clothes, he was also the first Indian to tell the world that India would fight to the end, to extinguish colonial rule. Perhaps with the exception of Lokmanya Tilak and a few of the great revolutionaries no other Indian was made to suffer the rigours of jail by the British more than Savarkar. Of the conditions in the notorious Andamans jail, it was said at the time that, 6 months in the Andamans jail were far worse and more rigorous than 10 years in a British jail on the Indian mainland. Savarkar was in the Andamans jail for over 10 years.

Much has often been made in particular by a school of history writing – that Savarkar was communal; he preached dislike for a particular community; he preached for an India that was primarily for the Hindus etc. One has only to read his, *The Indian War of Independence : 1857* to understand Savarkar's mind on the issue of how important he considered Hindu-Muslim relations and perhaps to appreciate that an individual's faith and belief did not in any way influence his political philosophy.

If Savarkar had harsh words for the British or sections of some minorities, it was not because of faith, religion or belief. What worried him was the attitude and the tendency of seeking a separate homeland based on religious following. Savarkar believed in an India that stretched from the River Indus to the ocean. Anything that even remotely contained the possibility of dividing what he believed was the 'natural'

Motherland was not acceptable to him.

He lived to see his prophetic warnings come true. India was divided on the basis of religion and faith. It was in this division and the politics that preceded it, that lay his strong differences with leaders who did not oppose the partition of India. Savarkar was against appeasement of any section of society. It is grossly misleading to suggest that he visualized a 'Hindustan' only for the Hindus. On the contrary, he cherished the preservation of the religion, culture and language of the minorities.

To understand Savarkar it is essential to understand that he distinguished between Hinduism, Hindu and Hindutva. When he talked of Hindustan being the homeland of the Hindus, it was only akin to Germany being the homeland of the Germans or Japan of the Japanese. Hindus were a majority – a huge majority. What was wrong, he would say, in seeking a Hindu homeland and calling it Hindustan? This did not mean for him that there was no place for minorities. Were not most countries of the world known by the name of the majority community that inhabited a given country?

Savarkar's political philosophy rested on the simple principle of integrity, unity and strength of the 'Motherland', a term he often used. With this objective, he expected all citizens, irrespective of being a majority or minority to be committed to this cause. It was only natural for him to distrust those who talked of a separate homeland that would have to be created by partitioning India. That the Muslim League posed the first major threat to a united India is what made Savarkar distrust sections of the Muslim population.

He refused to accept the concept of the partition of India (1947) or that it was the only way to ensure freedom for India from British rule. For him, the division of the country on the basis of faith was no option, it should not even have been considered, leave alone being conceded. He had mellowed down greatly as age caught up, but he was unable to forget or

forgive those who had enabled the partition of his 'Motherland'. This explains to a great extent his political differences with Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress as a party.

For those who have long been fed on the belief that Savarkar was distrustful of minorities or visualized a nation that had no place for them, it would be a surprise to read some of what Savarkar actually wrote on such issues. Some excerpts from his writings are included here.

He hated planted publicity or pscho-phancy. It may also come as a surprise that till the time Savarkar passed away in February 1966; most of his ancestral property that had been confiscated by the British, when he was sentenced to two life transportations (1910-1911) had not been returned. The level of his selfless devotion and integrity in public life would shock the political leaders of our times. Savarkar sustained himself and his family in his last years on a Government of Maharashtra monthly stipend of Rs. 300/-. Just a few months before his death, the Home Minister of India, Gulzari Lal Nanda, himself a man of spartan, simple living had felt the need to send a sum of Rs. 1000/- to look after the seriously ailing Savarkar. Savarkar's family received this sum in installments.

To understand Savarkar's intellect, his life and work at length, one would have to access his hugely important writings. He wrote *The Indian War of Independence 1857* (526 pages) in 1906-07 when he was just about 24 years of age. He followed this up with *Hindū Pada-Pādasāhī; Hindū Rāṣṭra Darśana; Essentials of Hindutva* and of course *My Transportation For Life* (545 pages). He wrote extensively in Marathi and also for newspapers. His *Letters From the Andamans* are a classic. Then there is *Epochs From Indian History; Dedication to Martyrs of 1857*. He was a great admirer of the Sikh Gurus, and learnt *Gurumukhi* to read the *Ādi Grantha, Pantha Prakāśa and Vicitra Nāṭaka*. At about the same time he translated into Marathi the great Italian hero of unification, Mazzini's, autobiography.

If numbers could tell the story or even a part of it.

Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for life on 23 December 1910. A second sentence for transportation for life was pronounced to him on 30 January 1911. Savarkar's first imprisonment in the dreaded Andamans Island's Cellular jail was from 4 July, 1911 to 2 May, 1921. On return from the Andamans cellular jail, he was imprisoned in Ratnagiri and Yeravada and released on 6 January 1924. He suffered two more sentences in free India, 5 February 1948 to 10 February 1949 and again from 4 April 1950 to 13 July 1950. In the Andamans jail, he was locked for six months in a closeted cell; suffered three solitary confinements of one month each, twice he was pegged to the wall in handcuffs for seven days each; he was put in chains for four months and was in cross bars for ten days.

How is it that a man who was made to undergo such rigorous imprisonment finds scarce mention in what has commonly been projected as mainstream history. A coincidence perhaps, but several such names that have been pushed out from the pages of history are people who were in their lifetimes politically and ideologically opposed to the ideas, the politics and the working of the Indian National Congress and its key leaders. Many of these great men and women were seen as political threats.

This monograph is not intended to be a comprehensive biography or study of Savarkar. It seeks only to introduce the reader in a preliminary manner to Savarkar in term of his ideas, his fascinating life, his virtually unparallel contribution and suffering for the cause of India's freedom. The narrative is based essentially on the writings of Savarkar as available in his collected works and some biographies, mainly the outstanding biography by Dhananjay Keer, the first edition of which appeared in 1950 and the second in 1966. The Private Papers of Savarkars, several other studies, reports and newspaper versions have also been sourced for this study.

It has not been easy to compress into a limited number of pages the essence of a life that was as dramatic and eventful as that of Savarkar. Some would probably say that much has

been left out and the narrative is somewhat one sided. Yes, while this is probably true, the fact remains however that no extra effort has been made or an emphasis added to make Savarkar or his work appear greater and grander than it actually was. On the contrary, much that could not be adequately corroborated and was in praise of Savarkar has been ignored.

A few words of why this monograph. It evolved gradually perhaps as a result of some comments, reports and discussions in sections of the print and electronic media in recent months. Many of those who have been commenting on Savarkar have been doing so only with superficial understanding. That history has been unfair to Savarkar, perhaps by design is also fairly clear. The idea is to introduce the reader in a simple and straightforward manner to this great Indian hero.

I must thank the Akhila Bhāratīya Itihāsa Saṅkalana Yojanā for publishing this monograph. I am grateful to Prof. S.C. Mittal, formerly Professor, Department of History, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra and at present National President, Akhila Bhāratīya Itihāsa Saṅkalana Yojanā, as also my teacher and (former) colleague, for his guidance and encouragement and to Shri Balmukund Pandey, National Organization Secretary, Akhila Bhāratīya Itihāsa Saṅkalana Yojanā for all his support. Shri Gunjan Aggrawala has as always been very helpful. I wish also to thank Dr. Ramendra Singh, Secretary, Vidya Bharti Sanskritik Shiksha Sansthan, Kurukshetra for his help.

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RAGHUVENDRA TANWAR

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1.

EARLY LIFE & FIRST PHASE OF STRUGGLE

FAMILY & CHILDHOOD



inayak Damodar Savarkar was born in the Village of Bhagur (near Nashik) on 28 May, 1883. He was one of three sons and a daughter born to Damodarpant Savarkar. The family was well off by standards of the time.

His father had good education and even had the ability to converse fluently in the English language. His mother was known by the name Radhabai.

What made Damodarpant stand out was that along with his English education he could recite from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He often read out to his children stories of historical figures like Shivaji, Rana Pratap and other men & women, who exemplified courage, valour

and honour. Interestingly the young Vinayak also had the opportunity to listen to his father read out from classics such as the *Iliad* and writings of Homer. It is obvious that Savarkar's childhood was spent in a family environment that was intellectually enriching and that which encouraged the children to develop a good view not only of India and its historical and cultural legacies but of the world as well. Not surprisingly, he was barely ten when a leading newspaper of Poona (Pune) published one of his poems. His life long habit of being a voracious reader was developed when still in his teens.

Savarkar was barely ten years of age when the news of the serious communal riots (Hindu-Muslim) in Azamgarh and later Bombay (Mumbai, 1893) reached his village. He is said to have been sad and angry. His biographer (Keer) even notes that as a young boy he even participated in a retaliatory protest.¹

Savarkar lost his mother to cholera (1898) and his father and uncle in the following year to plague. For the young Savarkar the tragedy was indescribable. His extraordinary grit however enabled him to tide over the crisis. He too suffered an attack of small pox while his brother Narayan was lucky to survive an attack of plague. The entire region of the then Bombay province was in extreme turmoil. Famine, plague, British atrocities were all common place. It was around this time that the Chapekar brothers shot dead the British Plague Commissioner Rand and another officer Ayerst (June 22, 1897). Damodarpant Chapekar embraced the gallows on 18 April, 1898. The great Balgangadhar Tilak too was arrested on charges of seditious writings. In the years to come, Savarkar would take pride in being counted as one of Tilak's greatest admirers and followers.

ABHINAVA BHARAT

This was the kind of surcharged political atmosphere in which Savarkar got together a small group of friends (1899) each of

1. Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, p.4.

whom was committed to the cause of freeing India. They swore secrecy and called themselves a Friends Union or '*Mitra Mela*'. This group came in 1904 to be known as the *Abhinava Bharat*. Over 200 students and some other people had gathered in an emotional and exciting atmosphere on the day that *Abhinava Bharat* was founded. The idea to found such a society drew inspiration from iconic revolutionaries as Italy's Mazzini and secret societies in Russia. It grew rapidly in central and western India and in due course across the world in the form of the Ghadar Party. *Abhinava Bharat's* most important objective was the independence of India, at any cost, if need be even by insurrection and armed revolt. It is important to note that Savarkar was then just about 20 years of age. What also stands out in Savarkar's life at this stage was that he recognized no caste distinction. More of course on his disdain for caste divisions later. The *Abhinava Bharat* went on in the years that followed to produce some of the first and greatest revolutionaries and revolutionary poets of the time. It laid the foundation for the struggle that followed.

Some years later when the trial of the Jackson murder case (Nashik conspiracy) took place the judge quoted at length on the danger from the *Abhinava Bharat*. *The Tribune* cited this judgement:

"It is by no means unusual to find the existence of societies aiming at the attainment of independence or Swarajya... prior to 1906 an association of young men existed in Nashik under the leadership of Ganesh and Vinayak Savarkar known as *Mitra Mela*... exciting songs were prepared for Ganapati and Shivaji festivals... biographies of patriotic revolutionaries were read, particular favourites being Mazzini, Shivaji and Ramdev... speeches were made for rising against the British and collection of arms and ammunition. ...Vinayak Savarkar had been the most active and stimulating... *Mitra Mela*

had developed or given birth to *Abhinava Bharat* or young Indian Society... objects were revolutionary.. aim of its members was to be ready for war... the book of verses composed by members was known as *Laghu Abhinava Bharat Mata...*"¹

Savarkar joined Poona's (Pune's) Fergusson College in 1902. By now, he was an established writer and spellbinding orator. Almost immediately on joining the college he started organizing and spreading his anti British and revolutionary ideas and programmes. He did this both secretly and even openly in the form of a hand written weekly, the '*Aryan Weekly*'. He wrote on literature, history, patriotism. Many of these articles were published by important newspapers of the time. One of his outstanding such article was titled, 'Saptapadi'. In this, he discussed the different stages through which a 'subject' nation is forced to move. Just as he mastered the Indian epics, he was equally familiar with Shakespeare. He was in particular fascinated by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Not surprisingly, his essay on the *Rāmāyana* was as much appreciated as his essay on the *Iliad*.²

In the Fergusson College, Savarkar and his group of young patriots had adopted the practice of dressing in similar clothes and completely boycotting anything that was foreign. Savarkar by now was also an ardent believer and followers of Lokmanya Tilak. A revering follower.

RUSTICATED FROM COLLEGE

October 7, 1905 was a milestone in Savarkar's early political career. It was Dassera day. Savarkar had organized a protest march and decided on organizing a bonfire of foreign goods and clothes. Some protesters suggested that the political speeches that were to be made after the bonfire should be made at another venue a place called Reay market, that is

1. *The Tribune* (Lahore), 5 January, 1911.

2. Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, p.15.

other, than where the clothes were burnt. Savarkar however insisted that the impact would be greater if the political speeches were made at the same venue while the clothes were still in flames. To every one's surprise Tilak supported Savarkar's stand. The speech that Savarkar made on the occasion was the stuff that came to be recited across the city of Poona in the days that followed. Savarkar thus became the first Indian to make a bonfire of foreign clothes. As a result, he also became the first Indian to be rusticated from a government-aided institution. He was also fined a sum of Rs. 10/-. Interestingly several moderate leaders of the Congress did not approve the public bonfire – these included the very eminent G.K. Gokhle and even Mahatma Gandhi, who was yet to return to India and was in South Africa at the time.

In Bombay, while studying for Law Savarkar also started writing for a Marathi Weekly, *Vihari*. He used his writings to spread the message of the *Abhinava Bharat*. Within a year, the young Savarkar was the undisputed leader of the revolutionary movement in western India.

LONDON – FREE INDIA SOCIETY

In 1906, on the recommendation of Lokmanya Tilak, Savarkar was selected for the Pandit Shyamji Krishan Verma scholarship to study in London. There is an interesting story of this scholarship. Balraj Madhok the senior Bharatiya Jan Sangh leader narrated an interesting and little known fact of Savarkar in an obituary essay he wrote on Savarkar's death in 1966. The scholarship for which Savarkar was selected had required applicants to write a few lines of their goals in life. This is what Savarkar wrote:

“Independence and liberty I look upon as the very pulse and breath of a nation. From my boyhood dear Sir, up to this moment of my youth the loss of independence of my country regaining it form the only theme of which I dreamt by night and day”.¹

1. *The Tribune*, 27 February, 1966.

He sailed for London on 9 June, 1906. Within months of reaching London, Savarkar started a new organization by the name of Free India Society. The Society in fact became in due course a recruiting ground for the *Abhinava Bharat*. Among those who joined as members were Bhai Paramanand, Lala Hardayal, Virendernath Chattopadhyaya and Madam Cama. Hardayal had topped Punjab University in M.A. English and was on a Govt. of India fellowship at St. John's College Oxford. This long list also included Madan Lal Dhingra. These were all men and women who sowed the first seeds of rebellion against British rule in India.

Within the first six months of his stay in London, Savarkar had translated into Marathi the autobiography of the great Italian patriot Mazzini. He dedicated it to Lokmanya Tilak. At the same, he learnt Gurumukhi and completed readings of the *Ādi Grantha*, the *Vicitra Nāṭaka* and *Panta Prakāśa*. Savarkar was greatly inspired and fascinated by the courage and sacrifices of the Sikh gurus and even published a pamphlet by the title of '*Khalsa*'. His love for the Sikhs stayed with him through his life.

The turning point in Savarkar's career in Europe was something quite of the mainstream at the time. It so happened that in Britain there was then this practice of, dedicating and celebrating the 1st of May each year as the day of deliverance and victory in the 1857 Uprising of India. Savarkar noticed the headlines and stories in most newspapers. With his great interest in history, he was obviously aware of the sacrifices made by countless Indians in 1857 as also the inhuman and violent manner in which the British had taken revenge. In response, Savarkar organized the 10th May 1907 also the 50th anniversary of the great Uprising as a day to remember the Indian heroes and martyrs of 1857. Indian students and other residents attended meetings, memorials, wore badges on their chests and even fasted.

Savarkar was by now a cult figure in the United Kingdom. As Asaf Ali wrote, "I wonder how so young a person

could command such respect..."¹ Savarkar was by now also regularly writing letters, and articles for European newspapers propagating India's point of view and the growing movement for freedom from British rule. Many of Savarkar's writings were also translated into European languages.

In India 1907, marked a shift from the policy of petitioning the British to one of action. The government had begun to come down hard on those who were propagating anti British views or seeking action rather than submitting petitions. Savarkar's, *Abhinava Bharat* was already in touch with revolutionary organizations in Russia, Ireland and even Egypt. This was the background in which Savarkar wrote his *Indian War of Independence of 1857*.

INDIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE OF 1857

Savarkar was only 24 years of age when he wrote the Marathi version of this classic story of the great anti British uprising of 1857. The English translation appeared in 1909. While introducing the first edition Savarkar had explained why he felt inspired to write the story: "...I found to my great surprise the brilliance of the War of Independence shining in the Mutiny of 1857... The spirits of the dead seemed hallowed by martyrdom and out of the heaps of the ashes appeared sparks of inspiration..."² The other reason was also that he was unable to accept the manner in which the British celebrated their so-called victory in 1857. He consciously called it a 'War of Independence'. In fact, much of what he wrote in this book had earlier formed a part of his public lectures delivered to members of the Free India Society.

The story of the publication of the first edition is almost as eventful and dramatic as Savarkar's own life. The British CID had got a scent of the books 'seditious' contents and were after the script. Savarkar smuggled the Marathi version to India. However, here too, it was impossible to publish it. The

1. Keer, *Savarkar*, p.38.

2. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. I, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, (Chandigarh 2007), Preface.

police even conducted raids on hideouts of the *Abhinava Bharat* suspecting that its members were in possession of the script. Since it could not be published in India, the manuscript had to be smuggled back to Paris. Savarkar believing that since the German printers were familiar with Sanskrit, they would be able to print the Marathi version, desperate attempts were made at different centres in Germany, but to no avail. A group of Marathi students who were in England now took up the task of translating the script into English. With the British CID on their heels, the first edition (English) was finally printed in Holland and smuggled back into France. It was immediately proscribed by the British government. Copies of the first edition were dramatically smuggled into India wrapped in the covers of popular English titles of the time.

In Europe, the book was distributed free of cost by the *Abhinava Bharat*. Thereafter activists like Lala Hardayal and Madam Cama published another edition. Hardayal had by now started his paper the '*Ghadar*' in the USA. He published select parts of the book in the paper. At about the same time it was also translated into several Indian languages and was soon like a Bible for the revolutionaries. In fact, many of the revolutionaries were arrested with copies of Savarkar's '1857' in their possession. The book remained proscribed till as long as the British were in India. Interestingly many senior leaders and freedom fighters had pleaded with the Congress leaders to put pressure on the British to lift the ban on the book. The matter however was not seriously pursued. The ban was lifted only after 1947.

It was Savarkar, who first drew attention through this work to names like the Rani of Jhansi, Mangal Pandey and Tantia Tope. To reproduce some interesting excerpts. In the context of Hindu-Muslim relations Savarkar wrote:

“...the nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future... The nation ought to be the master and not the slave of its own history... The feeling of hatred against the Mahomedans was just and necessary in the times of Shivaji –

but such a feeling would be unjust and foolish if nursed now... simply because it was the dominant feeling of the Hindus then...”.

Savarkar while commenting at length on what was to him the most outstanding feature of the great uprising, noted that it was the unity among Hindus and Muslims:

“So, now, the antagonism between the Hindus and the Mahomedans might be consigned to the Past. Their present relation was one not of rulers and ruled, foreigner and native, but simply that of brothers, with the one difference between them of religion alone. For, they were both children of the soil of Hindusthan. Their names were different, but they were all children of the same Mother; India therefore being the common mother of these two, they were brothers by blood. Nana Sahib, Bahadur Shah of Delhi; Moulvi Ahmad Shah, Khan Bahadur Khan, and other leaders of the 1857 felt this relationship to some extent and, so, gathered round the flag of Swadesh leaving aside their enmity, now so unreasonable and stupid. In short, the broad features of the policy of Nana Sahib and Azimullah were that the Hindus and the Mahomedans should untie and fight shoulder to shoulder for the independence of their country and that, when freedom was gained, the United States of India should be formed under the Indian rulers and princes”.¹

The emphasis being given to Savarkar's views a communal relations and interaction is to highlight that Savarkar's approach to the issue of relations among communities always revolved around national perspectives.

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. I, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, (Chandigarh 2007), p.72

Discussing how 'Hindus & Muslims' were the sons and daughters of the same soil, he writes:

“Most of the Talukdars in the Allahabad province were Mahomedans and their tenants were Hindus. Thus, the English had considered it impossible that these two would unite and that the whole mass of the people would rise against them. But, in this memorable first week of June (1857), how many... heard about the rising of the city of Allahabad, all the villages of the province rose simultaneously and declared their independence! Hindus and Mahomedans, because they fed on the same Mother's milk, rose together to strike blows at English rule! ...and, for the success of these huge efforts of the whole populace and for the freedom of the Motherland, the Prayaga Brahmins and Mullahs began to send forth prayers unto Heaven!... Besides, the sight of Hindus and Mahomedans fighting side by side for Hindusthan realizing their true interests and the natural comradeship, was truly magnificent and inspiring”.¹

What is interesting and very important in the young Savarkar's reading of the great uprising of 1857, is that to him it was an exceptional event because it exhibited great levels of Hindu-Muslim unity:

“So, in the truer sense, we said that the raising of Bahadur Shah to the throne of India was no restoration at all. But rather it was the declaration that the longstanding war between the Hindus and the Mahomedans had ended, that tyranny had ceased, and that the people of

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. I, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, (Chandigarh 2007), pp.188-190

the soil were once more free to choose their own monarch. For, Bahadur Shah was raised by the free voice of the people, both Hindus and Mahomedans, civil and military, to be their Emperor and the head of the War of Independence. Therefore, on the 11th of May, this old venerable Bahadur Shah was not the old Mogul succeeding to the throne of Akbar or Aurangzeb – for that throne had already been smashed to pieces by the hammer of the Mahrattas – but he was freely chosen monarch of people battling for freedom against a foreign intruder. Let, then, Hindus and Mahomedans send forth their hearty, conscientious, and most loyal homdage to this elected or freely accepted Emperor of their native soil”.¹

While recording the widespread involvement of people cutting across caste and communities he noted:

“The Brahmins of Thanesar and the Moulvies of Ludhiana, the shopkeepers of Ferozepore and the Mussalmans of Peshawar, were wandering about, preaching everywhere a holy war for the sake of *Swadharma* and *Swaraj*”.²

Savarkar did not shy away from admitting that the struggle of 1857 had not yielded the result that was expected, but in the same breath, he notes that, this was no reason to loose hope:

“Seeing at it through this telescope, what a spectacle comes into view! The war fought for *Swadharma* and *Swaraj* does not lose its luster by defeat. The splendor of Guru Govind Singh's life is nonetheless, because his efforts

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. I, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, (Chandigarh 2007), p.274.

2. *Ibid*, p.152.

did not immediately succeed at the time. Nor do we think the less of the rising of 1848 in Italy, because the Revolution failed completely at that time".¹

What worried the British about the contents of the book were lines like these:

"The command of God is, Obtain *Swaraj*, for that is the chief key to the protection of *Dharma*. He who does not attempt to acquire *Swaraj*, he who sits silent in slavery, he is an atheist and hater, of Religion. Therefore, rise for *Swadharma* and acquire *Swaraj*!...

'Rise for *Swadharma* and acquire *Swaraj*!' What divine events in the history of India are due to the realization of this principle! The poet-saint Ramdas gave the same dictum to the Mahrattas 250 years ago. 'Die for your *Dharma*, kill the enemies of your *Dharma* while you are dying; in this way fight and kill, and take back your kingdom!'

This alone is the principle in the Revolutionary War of 1857. This is its mental science. The true and only telescope which will show it in its true and clear form, is the above verse of Ramdas..."²

When Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for life in December 1910, the judge had specially quoted the danger to the Empire from Savarkar's writings:

"... Vinayak was leader of the group of students at India House... he dispatched to India a pamphlet 'O Martyrs' in praise of those Indians who fell on the rebel side during the

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. I, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, (Chandigarh 2007), p.14.

2. *Ibid.*

Munity...”

Referring to Savarkar's writings of the book (1857) the judge said:

“... we find the accused guilty of the abetment of war by instigating by the circulation of printed matter inciting to war... it amounts to declaration of war against the British government...”¹

Savarkar as pointed out earlier had a commanding understanding of world history. He frequently compared incidents in India to those elsewhere in the world. Commenting on the mistakes made during the 1857 uprising – he questioned as to which similar revolutionary attempt for freedom was free from mistakes. To him 1857 was incomparable:

“It is difficult to find in Indian history another revolution so exciting, so quick, so universal... the sight of Hindus and Mahomedans fighting side by side was truly magnificent and inspiring. After having set up such a terrible whirlwind shall we wonder that Hindusthan could not firmly keep it under control. The wonder is that Hindusthan could raise such a whirlwind at all...”²

MADAN LAL DHINGRA

But going back to Savarkar and his London days. Savarkar as earlier noted had founded the Free India Society. It was hugely popular and attracted Indian students from all over England. Anniversaries of icons like Guru Govind, Shivaji and most Indian festivals were celebrated. There was running under all these meetings a burning desire among its members to free India and rid her of British rule. Madan Lal Dhingra was also a follower and great admirer of Savarkar. It was from Savarkar

1. *The Tribune*, 5 January 1911.

2. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence: 1857*, p.190.

that he procured the revolver with which he shot dead Curzon Wylie. Dhingra's action would immortalize him in the annals of Indian history and for Savarkar, he remained a hero unparalleled. It was Savarkar, who managed to ensure that Dhingra's historic statement became public: "The War of Independence will continue so long as the English & Hindu races last..."

Dhingra was hanged on 17 August, 1909. Even as many of the moderate leaders of the Congress disapproved the approach of the revolutionaries, to Savarkar and his friends of the *Abhinava Bharat*, it was a new war that had now been started.

A day after Savarkar's death in the essay written by Madhok and referred to earlier Madhok also recollected an incident that took place in London soon after Dhingra had shot Curzon Wylie.

The title given to the essay was 'Great Patriot Whom the British Dared':

"This meeting unanimously condemns Madan Lal Dhingra declared the Agha Khan as Chairman of a public meeting held at Carlton Hotel in London on 5 July 1909 to condemn Dhingra for shooting Curzon Wylie. 'No not unanimously retorted a defiant voice from the audience. It was the voice of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, then a young law student at Grays Inn in London. This one incident made Savarkar the idol of patriotic Indians across the world and a dread for the mighty British empire...'"¹

MAHATMA GANDHI'S FIRST MEETING WITH SAVARKAR

Before we move further in the story. Mahatma Gandhi with whom Savarkar would have differences lifelong had been in

1. *The Tribune*, 27 February, 1966.

touch with Savarkar since 1906. Gandhi was invited to address the Dassera celebration (1909) in London. In his address, Gandhi is reported to have said that he was especially proud to have had the honour of sharing the Dias with and sitting next to Savarkar.¹ But Gandhi had serious differences with Savarkar and his thinking when it came to the revolutionaries and their agendas. In a subtle and indirect way, Gandhi noted his disapproval in the *Indian Opinion* which he had then started in South Africa: "...their bravery impressed me... but their zeal was misguided.. violence was no remedy for India's ills...".

ARRESTED & DEPORTED

The year 1909, was a volatile and inspiring one for those who believed that the British must be made to leave India whatever the price. The working of the *Abhinava Bharat* was traced out by the CID in India. One of the fallouts was that Savarkar's elder brother Babarao was sentenced to transportation for life on 8 June, 1909. He was charged for among other activities also for holding the view: "pray tell me who ever got freedom without war...". A few months later an attempt was made on the life of Viceroy Lord Minto (13 November 1909) by Mohanlal Pandya in Ahmadabad. On 21 December 1909, Anant Kanhere shot dead Nashik's Collector A.M.T. Jackson. Savarkar's younger brother too was now arrested.

In Europe, Savarkar was already on the run. The Jackson murder trial had established that he was the spirit of the Free India Society and *Abhinava Bharat*. He was declared the 'most dangerous wanted man'. To save his friends from arrest and torture he returned to London from Paris and was arrested at London's Victoria station on 10 March, 1910. A dramatic attempt was made by his friends and some Irish revolutionaries to free him by laying an ambush. But the police had learnt of the plan. The van that was supposed to have been transporting Savarkar was used by the police as a decoy.

Savarkar was chained and put on a ship for India on 1

1. Chitra Gupta, *Barrister Savarkar*, p.135, cited Keer.

July, 1910. In the French port of Marseilles as the ship lay docked, Savarkar jumped into the sea and swam to the shore. The plan was that he would be picked up by two colleagues of *Abhinava Bharat* - Madam Cama and Aiyar. But as they were late, Savarkar was arrested.

Savarkar had been in Europe for about 4 years almost to the day. In this limited time, he was now an icon among revolutionaries across Europe and had succeeded in bringing India's struggle for freedom to the world stage in a manner that could never have been visualized at the time.

REACHES INDIA – TRANSPORTED FOR LIFE

The ship carrying Savarkar touched Bombay port on 22 July, 1910. He was escorted in the ship by a team of British officers and was taken off the ship by a special police boat even before it had docked in the actual dock. The operation was led by Michael Kennedy, I.G., Bombay Police. The whole operation was undertaken in top secrecy.¹ He was transported by a special train to Nashik and then to Yeravada jail. The trial opened in Bombay on 15 Sept. 1910, with Savarkar now in the Dongri jail in Bombay. The court was like a fortress. He was escorted to the court by over 50-armed policemen. The Police Commissioner of Bombay was personally seen supervising the security in the court. Savarkar was already a household name in most parts of India. As *The Tribune* put it: "...the whole country is agog with curiosity as to the future developments in Savarkar's case..."²

On 23 December 1910, Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for life and confiscation of all property. In another sentence for charges that included supplying the revolver with which Jackson was killed, he was given a second sentence for life on 30 January 1911. This remained an un-established charge till the end.

One of the judgements' quoted from a pamphlet

1. *The Tribune*, 24 July 1910.

2. *Ibid.*

written by Savarkar, *Bande Matram*: "... campaign for separate assassinations is the best conceivable method of paralyzing the bureaucracy and rousing the people ...". He was charged for abetting and waging war and: "for overawing by criminal force or show of criminal force the government of India and the local government...".

Once the sentence was confirmed, Savarkar got back to doing what he liked most – writing. His first writing after the sentence was a poem dedicated to the life, sacrifice and courage of the great Guru Govind Singh – the last and 10th of the Sikh Gurus.

The Tribune located in distant Lahore had followed the trial in detail and wrote several editorials on Savarkar from the day of his landing in India to his deportation to the Andamans. In the Punjab, there was in fact widespread interest in Savarkar and his inspiring and courageous work. It commented on the sentence: "...sentences awarded are shockingly severe..."¹ Some days later, it commented on the sentence of his second transportation for life and said the prosecution was unable to directly prove his role, and at most could only show that he had supplied the revolver.² It is clear from the proceedings that Savarkar was given such a harsh sentence mainly because in him the British saw a huge potential for a uprising – a violent uprising against their rule.

From Dongri jail Savarkar was moved to Byculla and then to Thane jail. His departure from Thane to Madras (Chennai) enroute to the Andaman's cellular jail was supposed to have been a secret but some how the word got out. Thousands had collected at the station to have a glimpse. On 27 June 1911, he was finally chained and put onto the steamer S.S. Maharajah that sailed from Madras for Port Blair.



1. *The Tribune*, 28 December 1910.

2. *Ibid*, 1 February. 1911.

2.

THE ANDAMANS CELLULAR JAIL



avarkar's story of what transpired during his transportation for life in the British jails of the Andamans & Nicobar islands was published in his own words as the classic *My Transportation for Life*. Initially, he was hesitant but was persuaded to allow the scripts publication. The first part was published in parts by the great Tilak's *Kesari* in 1925-26. Thereafter since the volume was large, the remaining appeared in a series in *Shradananda* from January 1927 onwards. The whole work was published in a book form only in May 1927.

Savarkar's torturous sentence started from the journey to the Andamans itself and is best described in his own words:

"The evening came. It was blazing hot and the crowd was unbearable. The party of fifty who

were my immediate neighbours on the ship, came from the dirtiest class of Indian population. Hindus, Muslims, thieves, dacoits, they were all inured to filth, cruelty and crime. Some of them were stricken with foul diseases, some knew not what it was to brush their teeth, and all had piled their beddings one upon the other, and lay by each other without an inch of space between them. In this crowd, I made my bed and lay upon it. My feet touched their heads, and their feet came up near my mouth... I lay on my back. Right in front of me, I saw a big cask almost half cut and open. It was placed a little apart from the thick of the crowd, with a little open space near it. The space on my side of the partition and in the corner that accommodated me, was not so full of prisoners as that on the other. It was a little roomier and hence I was put there. But a horrible stink greeted my nostrils from that directions. And I had to stop my nose to avoid it. A neighbor pointed at the cask in the front. And I discovered that they used it all during the night as a chamber-pot and commode".¹

THE CELLULAR JAIL

Savarkar reached Port Blair on 4 July 1911. He would suffer this, the worlds most feared and notorious jail till 2 May 1921. His agony would be intensified as he knew that his elder brother was also in the same jail and the two would not be allowed to meet.

His first experience of the jail and its notoriety was when he realized that all political prisoners were put under charge of wardens who were *Pathans* and *Baluchis* and were feared for their fanatical hatred of Hindus. Three such

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.59.

wardens were specially chosen for Savarkar. The basic rule adopted to run the prison was that political prisoners were to be treated far worse than dacoits and murderers. Their will was to be smashed. As Savarkar puts it :¹

“The political prisoners were spilt up, and put in different chawls, and one in each cell of that chawl. If their talk with another excited the slightest suspicion, handcuffs were put on them, and they were subjected to all kinds of punishment. On the tank for a bath or in a row for their meal, if they merely signed to one another to inquire after health, the sentence for that infringement was to keep a man standing with handcuffs on, for seven days. And to crown it all, the sentence of picking oakum was substituted by work round the grinding oil mill. Yes, they had determined to break our spirit and to demoralize us. So they gave us that hard work to do for two months continuously, then one month on picking oakum, again the grinding work on the mill. We were to be yoked like animals to the handle that turned the wheel. Hardly out of bed, we were ordered to wear a strip of cloth, were shut up in our cells and made to turn the wheel of the oil-mill. Coconut pieces were put in, the empty and hollow space to be crushed by the wheel passing over them, and its turning became heavier as the space was fuller. Twenty turns of the wheel were enough to drain away the strength of the strongest coolly and the worst, brawny badmash. No dacoit past twenty was put on that work. But the poor political prisoner was fit to do it at any age. And the doctor in charge ever certified that he could

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.112.

do it! It was the medical science of the Andamans that had upheld the doctor! So the poor creature had to go half the round of the wheel by pushing the handle with his hands, and the other half was completed by hanging on to it with all his might. So much physical strength had to be expended on crushing the coconut pieces for oil. Youths of twenty or more, who in their lives had not done any physical labour, were put upon that labour. They were all educated young men of delicate constitution. From six to ten in the morning they were yoked to the wheel, which they turned round and round till their breath had become heavy. Some of them had fainted many times during the process. They had to sit down for sheer exhaustion and helplessness. Ordinarily all work had to be stopped between ten and twelve. But this 'Kolu', as the oil-mill labour was called, had to continue throughout. The door was opened only when meal was announced. The man came in, and served the meal in the pan and went away and the door was shut. If after washing his hands one were to wipe away the perspiration on his body, the *Jamadar*—the worst of gangsters in the whole lot—would go at him with loud abuse. There was no water for washing hands. Drinking water was to be had only by propitiating the *Jamadar*. While you were at the Kolu, you felt very thirsty. The waterman gave no water except for a consideration which was to palm off to him some tobacco in exchange. If one spoke to the *Jamadar* his retort was, "A prisoner is given only two cups of water and you have already consumed three. Whence can I bring you more water? From your father?" We have put down

the retort of the *Jamadar* in the decent language possible. If water could not be had for wash and drink, what can be said of water for bathing?

MUST FINISH YOUR QUOTA

What of bath? Even of our usual meal, it was the same story. The dinner being served, the door of the prison-cell was locked; and the *jamadar* was upon us to see, not if we had dined well, but if we had not already begun our round of the grinding oil-mill! He paraded through the chawl, halting before each room and announcing to its inmates in bad and threatening words that come what may, the usual quota had to be completed by evening. He added that otherwise the prisoner would get a sound thrashing from him and some additional punishment from his superior. When we heard this shouting, while we were just at our meal, the morsel in our hand would not go down, and we had to stop eating all at once. For every one of us had seen how a man who had failed to do his quota had a belabouring of kicks and fisticuffs from the august *Jamadar*, in addition to his bludgeoning him with the stick. The anticipation of this terror took away all appetite, though we were, all of us, indeed, very hungry. We got up, and began our work of pushing the handle and going round the mill like a yoked buffalo, with perspiration dripping down from our face, and its bead falling into the dish we were carrying in the other hand. I have seen prisoners working in this pitiable condition, - swallowing, anyhow, the food in their plate, and running round the mill at the same time. The claims of hunger could not be put off while

the demand of labour was equally excruciating. The work of the 'Kolu' had to be carried on in this condition till five o'clock in the evening with the hurried meal preceding it, the mode whereof I have already described. Out of a hundred, only one with a callous body could hardly complete his daily quota of thirty pounds of coconut oil. The rest took two days, at the least to crush so much oil out of dried coconut pulp. The novitiates, the simpletons, the inexperienced, and the honest were the greatest sufferers in the process. They always got the severest beating from the *Jamadar*, when they poured out before him the quantity of oil they had crushed from the substance; and they went back to their cells with tears in their eyes and groaning with pain. I see their weeping faces vividly even to this day!"¹

Of his own experience on the oil-mill, Savarkar writes:

"I put on the barest piece of loin-cloth round my waist. My work began precisely on the hour of six and it continued unbroken till ten. The continuous round gave me a sensation of dizziness. My body ached all through, and, as I lay upon the plank of a bed for rest and sleep, I felt feverish so that I could not sleep soundly as I did before. Wake up I must the next morning and resume the work. So it went on for a week, and I had not finished my quota. One day Mr. Barrie came to my room and said loftily, "A prisoner in the next room gives me his daily quota of thirty pounds of coconut oil, at 2 p.m. sharp, every afternoon. You have worked till evening and still you fall short of two pounds.

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.111-113.

You must be ashamed of it.¹

...while I was turning the oil-mill, one or two of the political prisoners, my neighbours, who could slip in unnoticed, always came to help me from time to time. Some of them washed my clothes, even with my protests to the contrary, though they had more than enough of their own hardships to bear. And they cleaned and washed my drinking pot and my dining plate as well. The petty officer and the *Jamadar* often reproved them for it, and even beat them occasionally; but like true friends, they helped me on in my daily work. I tried many times to stop them. I washed their clothes without their knowledge, which, when they learnt, gave them exceeding pain. They literally went down on their knees and besought me to refrain from it... to these political prisoners when I recall their unstinted generosity and their deep friendship for me. I also feel it my duty to put on record in these pages all that I owe, in help and kindness, to my ordinary brethren in that jail, and for the respect, they ever paid to me. I can tell many a story of their "unremembered acts of kindness and love". But I must not do so, and I record here my deep gratitude to them all."²

MEETS BROTHER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN JAIL

On his first meeting with his brother, who was in the same jail Savarkar writes: "... his (brother's) heart received a shock to know that I was here... he had seen me bound for England full of pride and expectations. He saw me now in the abject condition of defeated hopes with ashes of my failures rubbed

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.140.

2. *Ibid*, p.141.

over my body... a sight that astounded him... we came, saw and we separated. That was all of my meeting..."¹

On how he was treated, Savarkar writes:

"In the first six months of my sentence in the Andamans, I was treated as a prisoner in solitary confinement. As a matter of fact almost all other prisoners were sent outside the prison for their work after they had finished their term of six months of simple or hard labour in the prison itself. But at the time that they were taken out, I was released from my lonely cell. Even then, I was not allowed to mix with other men, but only made to sit in the gallery and opposite the door of my own room all by myself. Other political prisoners were free to talk and move with neighbours in their own block and those in common work with them. I alone was kept apart and all alone by myself. A special watch was kept on me to prevent me from any intercourse with other people of my class. For the whole day, I sat in the gallery and in front of my room busy in making coils of rope my daily labour at the time. With the evening, I was sent back to my own room and locked for the night. Years went on in this round of dull routine. The only exception of it being my hours of dinner, morning and evening. For two hours in the day, I could see human faces and exchange words with them".²

VIEWS ON MUSLIMS & SHUDDHI MOVEMENT IN THE ANDAMANs JAIL

From the day Savarkar landed in the Andamans, he had noted how Muslim warders were used specially by the jail officers to

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.135-136.

2. *Ibid*

instill fear in Hindu prisoners. He writes of how fear and other measures were used even to force Hindus to convert.

“Fourteen years of prison experience made me assert, without fear and favour, that the prison-mosque converts in one year more Hindus to Islam than the Jamma Masjid of Delhi or Bombay is found to do it”.¹

Interestingly he goes on to explain how only a small section of Muslims were doing this in the Andamans jail and that if this was happening the Hindus too were at fault:

“It is our sad fortune to refer endlessly to the misdeeds of our Muslim brethren in this record of prison-life, and of the *Shuddhi* and the *Sangathan* movements as part of that life. It is because they formed the most fanatical and the most mischievous element in the entire colony of prisoners in the Andamans. With the rest of the good and honest Mussulmans who I met within the Islands, I was always on the best of terms. They respected me and I respected them, as I enjoyed the respect of all other prisoners in that colony. Minus the particular question of coercive conversion, I always tried to see that justice was done to all of them and I took the side of justice against tyranny and oppression in every case and about every person, irrespective of his caste, creed and religion. If I succeeded in changing the hell of the Silver jail into a habitable place on earth for all its inmates and that by incurring the wrath of its authorities, the advantages of the change went as much to the Muslims as to the Hindus and both of them showed equal gratitude to me for it. That I was throughout just and fair to all is borne out by the fact that if I blamed the

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.266.

Muslims for the conversion of the Hindus I did not conceal the fact that most of it was due to the foolish notions about religion entertained by orthodox Hindus themselves. Conversion followed as a natural consequence from the obscurantism of Hindu society about purity and impurity, teachability and untouchability, conversion and reconversion.

I always used to assert, while engaged on these activities, that both the *Shuddhi* and the *Sangathan* movements in Hindu society were not the means of antagonism between the two communities of India; but of their abiding unity on the basis of right knowledge and right understanding.

This was the motive inspiring my agitation in the Andamans. I began my work of *Shuddhi* in the year 1913 and fought my first battle in its favour in the same year. From that date to 1920-21, I did that work in the Andamans from 1921-24 I continued it in my prison-days in India; and from my release in 1924, I have been pursuing it to this day. And I have invariably carried it on in the interests of freedom, justice and fair play for all. I have no hatred in my heart for the Christian, the Mussulman, and the heathen, or for those whom they style as primitive barbarians. I do not look down upon any one of them with scorn and contempt. I only oppose that section of it vehemently, which is oppressive and violent towards another. For I believe firmly that the *Shuddhi* movement itself will build a bridge of permanent union between the Hindus and the Muslims, and will bring good to both and lasting advantage to India as a whole".¹

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.311-312.

By 1915, Savarkar's health was in a bad state. Frequent dysentery, fever and no rest had taken its toll. Whenever he fell sick, unlike other prisoners, he was not shifted to the hospital ward but put in solitary confinement. It was only in the 8th year of his term that he was taken to hospital and allowed rest.¹

The story of Savarkar's transportation in the Cellular jail runs into over 500 pages. Every page is hair rising and leaves one thinking for days. Yet being what he was, he not only retained his balance but also used his body and mind to the best possible purpose.

LEARNS OF LOKMANYA TILAK'S DEATH

"Just at this time news reached the Andamans that Lokmanya Tilak had breathed his last. The news came to us at night as floating rumour, and in the following morning, it was definitely confirmed. My heart was deeply afflicted by the news and my soul found no peace. How were we to express the great grief that we felt? It was decided at eight o'clock in the morning that throughout the Andamans they should observe complete fast for the day, and they should hold condolence meetings in groups on the day following. I communicated the decision to my colleagues and workers. They passed it on all over the island and in the prison through our usual (secret) channels. The news and the resolution flashed like the wireless throughout the Andamans. At the dinnertime, it was found that every one of them had refused to take food, from the inmates of the Silver Jail to inhabitants on the far-off island of Ras. The officers could not make out what it was. But none would enlighten them on it. For to say that they fasted as a mark of mourning

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.404.



This rare photograph (1901) shows V.D. Savarkar sitting second from left. Perhaps the first photograph of some members of the '*Mitra Mela*' (Friends Society) which Savarkar had founded in 1900. It grew into the *Abhinava Bharat* in 1904. Others in the photo are Varman Shastri Datar to Savarkar's right and V.M. Bhatt and Appavartkar to his right. Note the common Cap and dress.

(Courtesy: Indira Prakash Collection, Photo Archives, Nehru Memorial Library & Museum, New Delhi)



VD. Savarkar seen coming out of a meeting with Sir Stafford Cripps. With him are Syama Prasad Mookerjee and B.S. Monje.
(Courtesy: Indira Prakash Collection, Photo Archives, Nehru Memorial Library & Museum, New Delhi)



V.D. Savarkar at a meeting of the *Abhinava Bharat* in Poona (Pune) 12 May 1952. Also seen are the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh *Sarsangchalak* (Chief) M.S. Golwalkar.
(Courtesy: Indira Prakash Collection, Photo Archives, Nehru Memorial Library & Museum, New Delhi)



V.D. Savarkar at a function organized in New Delhi on the occasion of the Centenary celebrations of the Uprising of 1857. To his right is Indira Prakash and to his left Gokul Chand Narang.

(Courtesy: Indira Prakash Collection, Photo Archives, Nehru Memorial Library & Museum, New Delhi)

was to talk politics; and the prisoner in the Andamans has no politics as the cow has no soul".¹

GURU GOVIND SINGH'S BIRTHDAY IN JAIL

Two other issues need reference from Savarkar's stay in the Andamans before we move to the next phase of his life. These are the organizing of inter caste eating and imparting of education to prisoners, particularly the younger ones. To break the barriers of caste, Savarkar started the practice of joint eating which was possible on occasions of Indian festivals. He writes:

"Whatever public work I could do under the new prison-regulation I did openly. For the rest we did it in our own secret way as before. For instance, we decided this year to celebrate in prison the birthday of Guru Govind Singh. I intended that the anniversary celebration should be on a grand scale so that the Hindus and the Sikhs might come closer to one another and the bond of unity among them might be strengthened, by the understanding and appreciation by them both of their common culture. The day fell on Sunday, and the prisoners in each wing of the jail could assemble together of the celebration. But as the prisoners in one wing could not go to prisoners in another wing, every school had to arrange for the celebration at a different hour. All of them were, however, equally eager to hear my speech on Guru Govind. So, I found occasion to visit two or three chawls by turns and delivered in each place a lecture on the great Guru of the Sikhs. In these anniversary celebrations of different chawls of the same

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.479.

prison, the Sikhs and the Hindus participated as brothers. They sang *bhajans* together, they heard lectures on the life of the Guru together, they listened to various anecdotes from his life together, and they pleaded for solidarity among them with unanimity and fervor. On that day, I had in the depot *puja* and *Prasad*. This *Prasad* known as *Kada Prasad* was distributed among all the prisoners of the place without distinction of caste and creed. According to the common practice on Sundays, the prisoners had to go back to their respective cells and be locked in it at a particular hour. That day I managed that they may be sent to their room, but the door be kept open. And when all the higher officers had left the place, I assembled them in the open courtyard and addressed the meeting. Prisoners from different chawls had come out to hear me, and petty officers and others who had now been converts to our view watched all about to warn us in time against the surprise visit of any higher officer of that place. A hundred of them had spread themselves out to keep guard. Others were at the meeting. We sang national songs on the occasion and then they heard my speech with rapt attention. The thing to note is this: we celebrated birthday of Guru Govind in a place where a few years before it was an offence for one prisoner to meet and talk to another. To swear by India as motherland was, of course, then out of question. And it has also to be admitted that not one in a hundred could have understood us then, if we were to speak to them of one country, one nation and one mother-tongue".¹

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.485.

A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN JAIL

"I decided to utilize my comparative freedom and power as foreman of the oil-depot, towards the systematic spread of education among the prisoners. I had always striven for it against tremendous odds as the prisoners had but known too well before. And when I wanted to launch upon a new Endeavour they openly came out to support me. I discussed the project with them and decided to start a school in the prison itself for the instruction of its juvenile offenders. I appointed an educated political convict as a teacher above them. I knew from my knowledge of prison administration in other countries of the world that, under proper training, the juvenile class of criminals turned out into good citizens. The teacher carried out his task with great efficiency. He was not content to teach them merely the three R's, but instructed them, according to the programme drawn by us, in subjects which made them sound in their morals and well-grounded in all that concerned national education. A *sloka* from the *Gita*, some important extracts inculcating sound principles of religion, drawn from our religious books, political news-these were the daily items of education in the classroom. They were to read and write in Hindi and in Nagari script. They were made to repeat and recite some of the national songs which I had specially written in Hindi for the use of free people in the Andamans. They were also taught many other national songs in Hindi which had a vogue in these islands".¹

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.483.

LIFE GOES ON IN THE ANDAMANS

In the Andamans, Savarkar, had ample time to theorise his political beliefs and develop concepts that would guide him in the years that followed. We have earlier taken note of how he took great pride in that Hindus and Muslims had fought shoulder to shoulder to uproot the British in 1857. He discussed this repeatedly and at length in his classic book on the great uprising. His painful and torturous experience of the cellular jail was bad enough but what shocked him above anything else was the manner in which Hindu prisoners were being forced to convert. The fanatical manner, in which some wardens were assigned to guard Hindu political prisoners too, left a deep and worrisome impact on his mind. His struggle to restore the respect and dignity of Hindus in the Andamans had started in the Andamans itself.

During the course of the first World War (1914-1918) as Savarkar continued his task of extracting oil in the cellular jail, his name was already iconic among the revolutionaries fighting for freedom across the world. The *Ghadar* paper started by his old friend the great Hardayal in San Francisco (1 November 1913) had spread Savarkar's message far and wide.

As the war ended there was wide spread demand for his release. Savarkar himself wrote several petitions. These of course were purely political statements. There was no question of surrendering or giving in. To Savarkar his being jailed in the far away Andamans islands was not just a transportation sentence but part of bigger British strategy to keep him away from mainstream political events on the mainland. He saw himself clearly as a political prisoner. He was aware that his return to the Indian mainland would be seen as a new threat. His political approach as time would show differed greatly with many of the senior Congress leaders, who for the British were for obvious reasons much easier to handle than people like Savarkar.

In the last week of May 1919, the Savarkar brothers were allowed after 8 years to meet their family – Vinayak's wife and their younger brother, who was now a Doctor. The years

1919-1920, saw slightly less rigorous conditions for the Savarkar brothers.

The end of the war and perhaps more so the important role played by the Indian troops in Europe had obviously impacted the British policy in India. A large number of political prisoners were released. But the Savarkar brothers were kept out of any consideration. Vinayak was already a household name almost an icon among revolutionaries and those that were fighting to expel the British from India even by the use of violence. It was in this background that appeals arose from across India for their release. In May 1920, even Gandhi wrote in the *Young India* that since there was no direct and absolute proof of their involvement in violence the state was bound to release them. In the Central Legislative Assembly and the Council of States, several members had also raised the issue of the Savarkar brother's continued detention even as amnesties were being granted to other prisoners.

Prisoners like Savarkar in the Andamans jail were allowed to receive and write two letters a year. For a man of such great intellect as Savarkar, such letters were an opportunity to share thoughts not only with the family but to write on issues of other importance. Some of these letters are masterpieces, reflecting as they do on Savarkar's commanding and in depth understanding of issues – a nationalist to the core.

Savarkar wrote about 40 different titles, together comprising of over 5000 printed pages. Many of his Andamans poems were etched on the prison wall with a nail from his shoe. Sometimes he would memories essays and poems by heart and speak them out to co-prisoners for further circulation.

LETTERS FROM THE ANDAMANS

Letter dated 15 December 1912:

“Dearest brother

Thus, it is after 18 months I have a chance to touch pen and ink again. At this rate, one can

quickly unlearn the art of writing all together! You must have been very anxious about this delay but as you had received a letter from our dearest Baba (elder brother also at the time in the same jail) in July, I thought it would be more assuring to you to hear from us a few months later than at about the same time. How glad was I to learn that you have joined the medical course and are doing well. How do you like that course? To me it is noble course. I should like you to take not only Medicine but also the Science of Physiology itself as your special province. Please do follow it up not only as a profession but also as a pursuit. It opens out inexhaustible field for charity and benevolence. It is respected all over the world, in the Hottentots as well as in the Aryans. The study of body- a temple wherein the soul lives - is next to the study of the soul itself.

And how do you like Bengal? By this time after the *Puja* holidays you are back to Calcutta and must have grown quite into a Bengali Babu – is not it? Forgotten Marathi language? Please take care you do not lose something else. For I am afraid I might hear at any time that some one in those clever Bengalis has stolen your heart away! Though I for one should like so much to have found a dear little Bengali sister-in-law. I am as strongly in favour of these inter-provincial marriages among the Hindus as I am deadly opposed to the practice of marrying the European girls *at this stage* of our national life.

...I get up in the morning when the bell goes on at 5 A.M. At its sound, I feel as if I have entered a higher College for a higher study. Then we are doing our work of rigour till 10

A.M. while my hands and feet are automatically doing the given task, my spirit avoiding all detection is out for a morning trip, and across seas and oceans, over hills and dales, it roams sipping only pleasant things, and things noble, like a bee amongst the flowers. Then I compose some new lines. Then we dine at 12 noon, work again. From 4 P.M. comes rest; reading & c. This is the usual round of life here.”¹

Savarkar was a man of great intellect, a voracious reader with a commanding view and understanding of the world and its history. In the same long letter (cited above), he also wrote:

“In your answer please inform me how our dear Motherland is getting on? Is the Congress united? Does it pass the resolution for the release of the Political prisoners from year to year, as it did at Allahabad in 1910? Any remarkable *Swadeshi* enterprise like the iron works of Tata or Steam Navigation Company or new Mills. How is the *Republic of China*? Does it not sound like *Utopia realized*? A romance of History! Don't suppose that China's work is a day's. No! from 1850, they have been strenuously at it, though the world knows, not where the Sun is making its way – till it is risen: and Persia, Portugal and Egypt? And are the Indians in South Africa successful in getting their demands? Please do mention if any important law has been passed by the new Councils, e.g. the Education Bill of the Hon. Mr. Gokhale. When the great Tilak is due to be

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Vol. III) *Letters From Andamans & Nicobar*, (Chandigarh 2007), pp.426-427.

released?"¹

In a letter dated 9 March, 1915- Savarkar replied by first telling his brother of how he had received his letter only after 8 months:

"It sent a thrill of delight in my heart to hear that the Indian troops were allowed to go to Europe, in their thousands to fight against the best military power in the world and that they had acquainted themselves with such splendor and were covered with military glory. Thank god! Manliness after all is not dead yet in the land! And what a funny thing! We have been trying our best to encourage foreign travel and used to congratulate ourselves if a dozen could be sent a year! And now Providence has done what we could not – thousands of Hindus, orthodox like the Gurkhas and Rajputs and reformed like the Sikhs have crossed the sea and under the Government patronage! Now let our Pandits sit hatching over the eggs of *Śāstrārthas* (शास्त्रार्थ) to see if foreign travel is permissible to the Hindus or not? Permissible or not, the Hindus *have* crossed the sea, and in crossing it they have crossed an epoch! What the crusades have done for Europe by bringing it in contact with the superior civilization of Asia, this conflict with the Europeans of our Hindu troops across the seas, will do for India – for Asia..."²

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1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Vol. III) *Letters From Andamans & Nicobar*, (Chandigarh 2007), pp.426-427.
 2. Throughout his life Savarkar emphasized on the need for the youth (Hindu in particular) to join the armed forces. See letter to President, Hindu Mahasabha, 18 October, 1945, Savarkar Papers Reel No. 29 (Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi - NMML).

...while I am reading the books you sent I see that in the Telagu provinces the new life that is struggling to find expression all over India, has been sweeping over our brethren there. The 'Andhra-Sabha' (vka/kzlHkk) is a great and grand movement but the question of getting that province separated from the Tamil one is not ennobling. But what pained me most and what was but a natural corollary from the desire of petty provincialisms was that the national shouts were 'Andhra Mata ki jai' (vka/kz ekrk dh t;!) In this little thing and straw we see the direction of an ominous wind to come. This is one of the unhealthy reactions of the grand Swadeshi movement and must be corrected before it is too late. The Swadeshi connected in Bengal with the little partition question brought in this reaction. Every province wants to be separated, and shouts and invokes, long life to itself! But how can the province live unless the Nation lives? They all – Maharashtra, Bengal, Madras – are great and will live long but through her-India! So let us not say 'Andhra Mata' (vka/kz ekrk dh) but 'Bharat Mata ki ji' (Hkkjrekrk dh t;) of whom 'Andhra' (vka/kz) is only a limb, and let us sing not 'Vang Abhar' (oax vkHkkj) but 'Hind Abhar' (fgan vkHkkj) All provinces and petty languages instead of asking to be separated should try to get amalgamated and remove the barriers that yet remain".¹



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1. Throughout his life Savarkar emphasized on the need for the youth (Hindu in particular) to join the armed forces. See letter to President, Hindu Mahasabha, 18 October, 1945, Savarkar Papers Reel No. 29 (Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi - NMML), pp.438-440.

3.

RETURN TO THE INDIAN MAINLAND

The orders for the release of the Savarkar brothers were received in Port Blair on 2 May 1921. There were celebrations among the prisoners even though Vinayak himself was sad that he would be leaving behind his friends of many years.

The Savarkar brothers were put on board the same ship that had taken them to the Andamans in 1911 – the Maharajha, to return to the Indian mainland. On reaching Calcutta, they were taken to Alipore jail. Thereafter, Savarkar's brother Babarao, was separated and sent to Sabarmati jail from where he was released when he fell seriously ill in September 1922. Savarkar, himself was transferred to Ratnagiri jail.

RATNAGIRI & HINDUTVA

It was in the Ratnagiri jail that he penned the classic and all-important *Hindutva*. Since, he was in jail, the author's name was given as Maratha. Thereafter as time would show, the whole movement of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism came to be guided by this treatise. In the years that followed, there was in his policy and public stances a consistent level of commitment that drew its inspiration from this work. As time passed Savarkar's tone and tenor hardened, but throughout we note that he stuck to his views of what was to him the true meaning of *Hindutva* as discussed in his work written in Ratnagiri.

In 1923, Savarkar was yet again shifted to another jail from Ratnagiri. This time it was Yeravada. This would be his second time in Yeravada, the first being in 1910. Records do not provide sufficient answers as to why Savarkar was moved so frequently. But one possible explanation is that his stature being such, the government remained conscious that his very presence in one place inspired other prisoners with anti British feelings. We have earlier seen how he transformed the hopeless environment of the jails in the Andamans. In the Andamans, he had among other things started a Primary school, organized discreet hunger strikes, started a library, given secret talks on nationalism and history. Such was his inspiration that many of the prison officials too stood converted to his cause.

Yeravada as Savarkar puts it was a different place this time. It was filled with prisoners from Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. It also housed another category of prisoners – those who were sentenced for transportation for life and had been moved from the Andamans and some brave Sikhs of the Lahore conspiracy case.

Savarkar was strictly forbidden even to talk with any of the long term political prisoners:

“I managed secretly to see (old friends from the Andamans) then... with tearful eyes we

greeted each other. In the Andamans, we had suffered together. Any one of us could have won freedom in a day by the betrayal of our friends, by giving away the secrets of our society..."¹

Savarkar was pained and surprised to see the behaviour of some of the prisoners, who were detained at Yeravada usually for small periods following the Non-Cooperation Movement (1921). As he puts it:

"The new comers, the non-cooperators looked down upon these (the Andamans prisoners) the seasoned soldiers, these fighters and revolutionaries as sinners, because they were members of secrets societies... the non cooperators had not seen even two years of prison life... They were vainglorious men and they bragged of their suffering before those, who had passed through ten years or more of transportation for life in the Silver Jail of the Andamans, the brave Sikhs who had never winced under the severest of hardship... I began to criticize all those followers of Gandhi that their eyes might see clearly... winning the *Swaraj* by *Charkha*... and ridiculous definitions of non-violence... these new comers and patriots had false notions instilled in their minds about Hindu Sangathans..."²

Mahatma Gandhi too was in Yeravada at the time, just a wall away. Savarkar further says: "...I never minced matters in attacking his gospel and method of non cooperation..."

FREE FROM PRISON - RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE

Savarkar walked out of Yeravada jail on 06 January 1924. His

1. Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, p.530.

2. *Ibid.*, p.531.

last secret lecture in Yeravada was on Madan Lal Dhingra. "Yes, I am free. The iron fetters on my feet are broken... my soul is still imprisoned for my vision is still not reached... it engirdles my soul and stifles it".

On release from prison, Savarkar stayed briefly in a village near Ratnagiri, which was still till then not fully free from plague. Thereafter the government allowed him to settle in Ratnagiri.

Savarkar's release from the Yeravada jail was only in fact a half release. The order of the government stated: "...will not move beyond the limits of Ratnagiri without the permission of the government and in an emergency without the permission of the District Magistrate".¹

In 1925, Savarkar sought permission to enroll in the Bar of the Bombay High Court. His request, was rejected without assigning of any reason.²

It may appear out of context, perhaps even unnecessary but a reference needs to be made to the manner in which a school of historians have misrepresented the contents of the representations made by Savarkar to the government seeking withdrawal of restrictions even after release from Yeravada jail in 1924. Such views ignore the fact that Savarkar was made to spend the best years of his life in the inhuman conditions of the Andamans Cellular jail. All he wanted was to continue his life's mission. One has only to go through his private papers to understand that Savarkar retained his defiance and dislike for the government – even though he was forced to be helpless. Far from being apologetic or seeking forgiveness, Savarkar did not spare one occasion to draw attention to the ills of British rule. Is it difficult to understand that if the British did not fear him, they would not have put such conditions on him. Savarkar was perceived as a serious threat to the empire. What does this make him?

1. Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 22, R-6449 (NMML).

2. Letter of P.B. Malabari, Registrar, Bombay High Court, 17 April 1925, Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 22, R-6449 (NMML).

A day to day almost an hourly watch was maintained by the police on Savarkar with a strict limitation on his movement from the time of his release from prison in January 1924 to 1937. He made several requests for withdrawing the restrictions but all were turned down. On his part, throughout his period of detention he continued to defy the government in some form or the other. For example on 1 March 1925, he wrote an article for the *Maratha*. He was issued a notice of warning by the Home Department.¹

It was on 10 May 1937 that restrictions were lifted, and he was truly a free man: "The Governor of Bombay is pleased to direct that the conditions subject to which the unexpired portion of transportation for life passed upon you were remitted are withdrawn..² Thus put together he had been a political prisoner for over 27 years.

MEETS DR. K.B. HEDGEWAR

In March 1925, a historic meeting took place between Savarkar and Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. For India, these were difficult years. The Non-Cooperation Movement had failed and there was loss of political direction. Dr. Hedgewar was an upright and unyielding nationalist, who believed in the course of a Hindu nation and sought to build an organization that would channelize the energy and support of the youth in particular towards the objective of an ideal nation.

It was also during this period that Savarkar wrote extensively against Gandhi's policy of appeasement of the minorities – Muslims in particular. The murder of Swami Shradhanand at the hands of Abdul Rashid and the Moplah riots that failed to evoke a strong condemning reaction from Gandhi saddened Savarkar. Savarkar believed Gandhi should have condemned what happened in stronger terms.

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1. Letter of Deputy Secretary, Home Department, 28 March 1925, Private Papers V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 22, R-6449 (NMML).
 2. Ibid. Letter of District Magistrate, Ratnagiri, 10 May 1937.

SECOND MEETING WITH MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhi was in Ratnagiri in March 1927. Although he was there for some other purpose, when Savarkar, who was down with fever learnt of Gandhi's presence, he sent a note inviting him to his residence. Gandhi curtailed some other engagements and met Savarkar. They had known each other since 1906, and notwithstanding all their difference they were still good friends. They had now met after almost 18 years.

It was a very cordial meeting. Savarkar warmly received Gandhi and Kasturba. As Gandhi left, he told Savarkar that he would have liked to spend a few days more with him, but had committed to other engagements. Gandhi is also reported to have remarked: "Our goal is ultimately one, we both strive for the glory of Hinduism and Hindustan". He also said, "it is clear we disagree on some issues..."¹ As fate would have it, Gandhi and Savarkar did not get another chance to meet each other. This proved to be their last meeting.

AGAINST CASTE BARRIERS

We have already taken note of how Savarkar detested the concept of caste and untouchability. In 1925, the issue of entry into temples by the so-called untouchables had come into prominence. Savarkar this time started the Pan Hindu Ganesh festival and brought in the untouchables into the Vithoba temple in Ratnagiri. Several others incidents occurred in these years which saw Savarkar standing up for the deprived classes. He was by now was a strong supporter of Dr. Ambedkar. Savarkar had already started the concept of inter-caste dinning in the Andamans jails particularly on the occasion of festivals etc. In 1930, he organized the first *Sahabhojan* – where everyone ate together, breaking age-old barriers and traditions.

Savarkar's approach to breaking such barriers of caste was rational and constructive. Obviously, there was no political angle to it. He was fearless and never thought in terms

1. Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, p.177.

of gain and loss. In a way, his activities of social reform had preceded even Ambedkar in Maharashtra. Both Savarkar and Ambedkar admired each other. Savarkar on his part thought very highly of Dr. Ambedkar and his movement for social equality and upliftment. Savarkar however strongly disapproved of Ambedkar's call to the depressed classes to convert from Hinduism (October 13, 1935)

RATIONALITY

Savarkar was deeply scientific in temper and was a complete rationalist. He hated and rejected superstition and often said that superstition is what kept our people away from science - it was a curse. The definition of morality he often said should be framed in reference to the common good of mankind. In a brilliant article dedicated to machines, he wrote: "Astrology cannot save what science has doomed and where safety is assured by science astrology cannot endanger it..."

Savarkar refused to accept blind traditions, and said that even the ancient scriptures should be put to scientific tests: "The *Smṛtis* and the *Vedas*, we love reverentially not as unchangeable works, but as historical books and as landmarks in the glorious journey of the human race". He wanted the Hindus in particular to test ancient knowledge, laws and learning's on the 'touch stone of science'. To him no animal was sacred. He wanted not cow worship, but cow protection.

POLITICS IN THE 1930S & 40S

As the country gathered momentum towards freedom, political divisions became sharper. Issues became more complex. For example, as early as '1937' (13 December), while speaking at Nagpur he had warned that the emerging scene in the state of Kashmir was not a good sign. He was perhaps the first leader of such stature to have predicted that someday, if not checked in time, the Hindus of Kashmir would be in serious danger.

Even as the concept of Pakistan was yet to be formally announced as the Muslim League's political agenda, the

League was already and clearly on the road to seeking a division of India on the basis of religion. To Savarkar this was a threat to which he had for long been drawing attention. The harder the tone of the Muslim League became, the more Savarkar spoke of *Hindutva*. In several addresses all over the country and particularly in his Presidential Addresses at the Annual Sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha, he spoke at length on the issue.

Some examples of his thoughts during these days would be in place. In his address at the 20th Session of the Hindu Mahasabha in Nagpur (1938) he said:

HINDU NATIONALISTS SHOULD NOT BE APOLOGETIC

“The fact is that Nationalism and Communalism are in themselves either equally justifiable and human or not. Nationalism when it is aggressive is as immoral in human relation as is communalism when it tries to suppress the equitable rights of other communities and tries to usurp all to itself. But when communalism is only defensive, it is as justifiable and human as an equitable nationalism itself. The Hindu nationalists do not aim to usurp what belongs to others. Therefore, even if they be called Hindu communalists they are justifiably so and are about the only real Indian Nationalists. For, a real and justifiable Indian Nationalism must be equitable to all communities that compose the Indian Nation... The Indian National Congress only condemns itself as an anti-national body when it calls in the same breath the Hindu Mahasabha and the Moslem league as bodies equally communal in the reprehensible and treacherous sense of that

term. Consequently, if to defend the just and equitable rights of Hindus in their own land is communalism then we are communalists par excellence and glory in being the most devoted Hindu communalists which to us means being the truest and the most equitable Indian Nationalists!"¹

The government of Sind had proscribed the *Satyārtha Prakāśa*. Savarkar was the first to vehemently oppose the move. Writing to the Governor, he said:

"...proscription is bound to result in a Hindu counter demand to proscribe some parts of the Quran..."²

LET THE HINDU SANGHATANISTS BOYCOTT THE CONGRESS

"Before we proceed to indicate the easiest remedy to capture the political power and disable the Congress from doing any practical harm to the Hindu Sangathan movement let us declare in unmistakable terms that we are not out to spite the Congress Institution itself, nor the leaders and followers thereof. Mr. Jinnah is quite correct in stating that the Congress has been since its inception down to this day a Hindu body manned mostly by the Hindu brains, Hindu money, and Hindu sacrifice. Even today, some of them are noble patriots. They are erring but cannot be wicked and almost all of them are our own kith and kin. The few Moslems there, although they are allowed to boss the Congress policy at times through the suicidal folly of the Hindu leaders, are but nonentities, are kept there merely as

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. IV, *Hindu Rastriya Darshan*, p.259.
2. Private Papers V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 29, R-6456 (NMML).

figureheads to run the poor show of a 'United Indian Nation'. We are out not to spite the Congress as an institution but to chastise its anti-Hindu policy, to cure it of the intolerable hypocrisy which is all the more harmful for its strutting about under the mask of Truth, Truth absolute and nothing but Truth, with its lathi charges and English bayonets going merrily hand in hand with non-violence, non-violence absolute and nothing but non-violence in thought, word and deed!!"¹

24TH SESSION HINDU MAHASABHA 1942

"Although we want *Swaraj*, yet that *Swaraj* must mean the *Hindusthani Swaraj* in which Hindu, Moslem and all other citizens all have equal responsibilities, equal duties and equal rights. Such a *Swaraj* would not even tolerate a particular community on religious grounds to get itself cut off from the Central Government, demand portions of our country which is the inalienable basic on which this our national *Swaraj* stands and any such aggressive claim on the part of a community would be immediately put down as an act of treachery by the united strength of the Central Government. Secondly, it is silly to believe that England is only waiting for a united demand and would walk out of India as that rag, signed by the Hindus and Moslems, is handed over to them. I emphatically assert that even if the Congress, Hindu Mahasabha and the League produce a united demand signed by all the crores of Indian citizens and ask univocally for independence, Britain will never give it for the

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. IV, *Hindu Rastriya Darshan*, p.264.

mere asking".¹

HINDUTVA IS DIFFERENT FROM HINDUISM

To this category of names which have been to mankind subtle source of life and inspiration belongs the word *Hindutva*, the essential nature and significance of which we mean to investigate into. The ideas and ideals, the systems and societies, the thoughts and sentiments which have centred round this name are so varied and rich, so powerful and so subtle, so elusive and yet so vivid, that the term *Hindutva* defies all attempts at analysis. Forty centuries, if not more, had been at work to mould it as it is. Prophets and poets, lawyers and lawgivers, heroes and historians, have thought, lived, fought and died just to have it spell thus! For indeed, is it not the resultant of countless actions – now conflicting, now commingling, now co-operating – of our whole race? *Hindutva* is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be by being confounded with the other cognate term Hinduism but a history in full. Hinduism is only a derivative, fraction, a part of *Hindutva*. Unless it is made clear, what is meant by the latter the first remains unintelligible and vague. Failure to distinguish between these two terms has given rise to much misunderstanding and mutual suspicion between some of those sister communities that have inherited this inestimable and common treasure of our

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar*, Vol. IV, *Hindu Rastriya Darshan*, p.440.

Hindu civilization. What is the fundamental difference in the meaning of these two words would be clear as our argument proceeds. Here it is enough to point out that *Hindutva* is not identical with what is vaguely indicated by the term Hinduism. By an 'ism' is generally meant a theory or a code more or less based on spiritual or religious dogma or system. But when we attempt to investigate into the essential significance of *Hindutva*, we do not primarily – and certainly not mainly – concern ourselves with any particular theocratic or religious dogma or creed. Had not linguistic usage stood in our way then 'Hinduness' would have certainly been a better word than Hinduism as a near parallel to *Hindutva*. *Hindutva* embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being or our Hindu race. Therefore, to understand the significance of this term *Hindutva*, we must first understand the essential meaning of the word Hindu itself and realize how it came to exercise such imperial sway over the hearts of millions over millions of mankind and won a loving allegiance from the bravest and best of them.¹

IN THE PUNJAB

Savarkar thought very highly of the great sacrifices made by the Sikh Gurus for the cause of their faith. He was very close to several Sikh prisoners, who were with him in the Andamans jail. He reverently admired the courage of the Sikhs. He was thus naturally very excited and upbeat when he visited the Punjab in May 1938. He received a huge welcome in the Golden Temple, Amritsar where thousands had gathered

1. Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva, Collected Works*, Vol. IV, Part III, pp.460-461.

under the leadership of Master Tara Singh to receive him. As Savarkar approached Amritsar, about 60,000 people escorted him into the city in a procession. *The Tribune* covered the visit extensively and noted:

“The speeches made by him (Savarkar) during the last three days show unmistakably the soundness of his political views. His conception of a modern nation and an ideal state in which no difference is made between one person and another on the score of community, religion or caste. ...it is only right that he should want the Congress not to recognize religion, caste or community and to stand for equal rights of all citizens”.

In Lahore, as Savarkar garlanded the statue of Lala Lajpat Rai, the unprecedentedly large crowd applauded for minutes without a break. As reports put it, the sound of the applause was heard miles away. In another speech in the same tour Savarkar said: “the more you hanker after the Hindu-Muslim unity the more it runs away from you...” Referring to Mohammad Ali Jinnah, he said: “he and Jinnah were not birds of the same feathers...”

TOURS INDIA

After Punjab, Savarkar toured Rajasthan and then Sind. In Karachi the procession in which he was taken to the venue of the public meeting took five hours, such was the crowd. It was led by Baba Madan Singh Gaga a Ghadar leader, who was in the Andamans jail with Savarkar.

After Sind, Savarkar toured Hyderabad and parts of Maharashtra. In February 1939, Savarkar was in Bengal. He received a huge response. It was during this tour that Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who came to play an important role in the years that followed came to political light in a big way. In September 1939, Savarkar toured Karnataka followed by another tour of Maharashtra.

Serious attention was given by several national dailies

to the views that Savarkar shared during these tours. As the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* put it: "His humour is caustic, logic is merciless and irony is effective... The faith that burns in him throws a halo all around as he advances delivering his message as a conquering hero..."¹ Across India Savarkar as one paper put it, had come to be seen as a man who was not afraid to call a spade a spade.

CONGRESS SEES SAVARKAR AS A THREAT

Not surprisingly like the British, the Congress too had now begun to see Savarkar as a clear threat. We thus note that following one of his tours as he returned to Bombay several senior leaders including Chimanlal Setalvad, Cowsji Jehangir, N.C. Kelkar, V.N. Chandavarkar and Savarkar issued a statement: "the Congress believe in annihilating all parties and making the Congress the only party in the land..."²

Savarkar's problem with the Congress had nothing to do with political power and office. Savarkar was not in this race. It was in fact fundamental. Throughout his life Savarkar had stood on the ground that a minority problem was there only because a few select leaders believed it was so. This threat perception in fact suited a set of leaders both from the Muslim League and the Congress. For Savarkar all this talk of and extra importance given to the minorities was ill conceived and against the cause of India. To quote Keer:

"Savarkar was for Hindu-Muslim unity and contemplated a non-sectarian State for India. He held that it was as suicidal, as ridiculous to borrow hostilities and combats of the past only to fight them out into the present, because Shivaji and Aurangzeb had done it. But he justified the past struggle of the Rajputs, the Sikhs and the Mahrattas to overthrow the Mogul rule as he considered, "as long as the

1. Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, p.253.

2. P.R. Lele, *War and India's Freedom*, p.89, cited Ibid., p.245.

Muslims lived in India in the capacity of alien rulers, so long, to be willing to live with them as brothers was to acknowledge national weakness". So he was never prepared to accept the Muslim domination or their demand for vivisection of India. He contemplated that kind of unity which would go to create an Indian State in which all citizens irrespective of caste, creed, race or religion were treated all alike on the principle of 'one man one vote'. In this view Savarkar was not far way from the realistic approach of Gokhale, Pherozeshah Mehta, Dr. Annie Besant or Dr. Ambedkar. But Savarkar did not want the majority to go on its knees to the recalcitrant minority. Therefore, he considered that seeking unity on the part of the majority was losing it".¹

He considered the Congress brand of nationalism which ignored or denounced devotion to the Motherland as worse than communalism... he had to pay dearly for his views... the entire Congress and the press turned against him denouncing him as a reactionary and a communalist".²

In a letter that he wrote to Savarkar a Hindu Mahasabha colleague discussed how much he disapproved of the Congress:

"It matters not that we win but it does matter that you bravely retaliate – the Congress must know that even a hand full of Hindu Sabhaites are capable of giving them sufficient trouble..."³

1. Keer, *Savarkar*, p.270.

2. *The Tribune*, 27 February 1966.

3. Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 32, R-6459 (NMML).

SAVARKAR'S INDIA

- (a) In Savarkar's India all citizens would have equal rights and obligations irrespective of caste, race or religion provided they avow and owe an exclusive and devoted allegiance to the State.
- (b) All minorities would be given effective safeguards to protect their language, religion, culture, etc. but none of them would be allowed to create a State within a State or to encroach upon the legitimate rights of the majority.
- (c) The fundamental rights of freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, of worship, of association, etc. would be enjoyed by all citizens alike; whatever restrictions would be imposed on them in the interest of the public peace and order or national emergency would not be based on any religious or racial considerations alone but common national grounds.
- (d) One-man one vote would be the general rule irrespective of caste, creed, race, or religion.
- (e) There would be joint electorates.
- (f) Services would go by merit alone.
- (g) Primary Education will be free and compulsory.
- (h) Every minority would have separate schools to train their children in their own tongue; their religious and cultural institutions would receive Government help also for these, but always in proportion to the taxes they pay into the common exchequer.
- (i) The residuary powers would be vested in the Central Government.
- (j) Nagari would be the national script, Hindi, the *lingua franca* and Sanskrit, the *Devabhasha* of India.

FREEDOM & NATIONHOOD

Two basic principles were adopted by Savarkar as the foundations of his political career – Independence and the Indivisibility of India. For him from the Indus to the Oceans –

India was one. His basic issue with leaders such as Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru was that he believed they were on a path that would divide India. He believed that the policies adopted by the Congress were essentially self-seeking and shortsighted. As independence drew near he was among the first to sense the danger to the unity and integrity of India. As he put it, the more the Congress yielded the more the Muslim League demanded. To him anything that did not stop the process of division of India irrespective of all its moral strength or whatever, was just not acceptable. He believed that the Nation's overall good and integrity was far more important than policies that may appear morally appealing to the world but were causing implicit damage to the country.

IN KASHMIR

Savarkar visited Kashmir in July 1942. He was received by huge crowds at stations enroute – Amritsar, Lahore, Vazirabad. He addressed several meetings in Jammu. He reached Srinagar on 14 July and addressed three meetings. He was frail and not well, yet was taken in a huge procession with people lining up to touch his feet and have a glimpse. On his return to Bombay he issued a statement that warned of how the situation could go out of hand if the majority (Muslim) population tried to over-raw the minorities, particularly in the valley. Like always, here too Savarkar's prophesy as time would show proved dead right.

Poona saw perhaps its biggest ever-public meeting on 28 May 1943. It was organized by the Savarkar Reception Committee headed by N.C. Kelkar to celebrate the birth anniversary of Savarkar. This was also the time that Bengal was ravaged by a famine. Savarkar in spite of failing health played a frontal roll in encouraging people to come forward to help.

SPEAKS UP AGAINST PARTITION

In the months that followed it became clear that India was slowly inching towards a division. The developing political picture saw Savarkar issuing some of his most angry statements. He was extremely unhappy with Gandhi. On 13

August 1944, he drew attention to how Gandhi and the Congress were guiding the country to a path that would certainly lead to the division of India. "But the darkest sin of vivisection of our Motherland and Holy land is still going to crown his political career and all this in the name of non-violence, truth and God".¹

In a telegram to N.C. Chatterjee the senior Hindu Mahasabha leader of Bengal on 7 August 1944 Savarkar said:

"It is encouraging to note that Hindu Bengal has risen to defend the integrity of India. Our fathers smashed the settled partition of Bengal. Their sons must smash the proposed partition of India."²

Savarkar was dead against any proposal or plan that would even remotely contain the possibility of India's partition. It was therefore, natural that C. Rajagopalachari and his plan should have greatly angered Savarkar. Rajagopalachari questioned Savarkar: "Mr. Savarkar has stated that it is the duty of the Hindu Sanghatanists to denounce the proposals (suggesting Pakistan) but what about the duty of the Indian Sangathanists whose aim is to be free and not only to be organized against the Muslims."

Savarkar responded and asked Rajagopalachari, if those who opposed the division of India were more Indian *Sanghatanists* or those who supported it. He went on: "Who were more Indian *Sangathanists* – those who led the butcher's knife to the neck of the Motherland or those who wanted to ward of the murder..."³

Savarkar was obviously by now fighting a lost cause. Yet even after Viceroy Mountbatten had announced the partition plan (3 June 1947), Savarkar pleaded upon the Hindu

1. Keer, *Savarkar*, p.355.

2. Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 29, R-6456, Telegram to N.C. Chatterjee (NMML).

3. Keer, *Savarkar*, p.356.

Mahasabha (8 June) to not be a party to this 'warrant of death' of India. On 2 August 1947, Savarkar addressed yet another mammoth public meeting in Poona. He said that as things stood at the moment, while the main responsibility lay at door of the Congress but the people too were responsible as they had not taken timely action against the party. He explained his view of how by repeatedly appeasing a section of people, communalism had succeeded in dividing the age-old nation.

WHY NOT A HINDU STATE

About a month into freedom and the partition of India, Savarkar, issued a statement criticizing the concept of partition and the creation of Pakistan. In fact this was a reaction to a statement of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Savarkar responded to Nehru in a statement on 7 October 1947. He started by saying that people had the right to defend themselves, when the state failed to do so. He said the Sikhs and Hindus fought for their lives, faced by the imminent danger of being massacred. And this was happening all the while when the "Congressites were celebrating their bloodless revolution, brought about by the division of India".¹

He went on to charge Nehru for looking at things only from one angle: "the demand for a Hindu Raj these pseudo nationalists say is communal, stupid, medieval... did not the Muslims base their claims to own Pakistan on the ground that Muslims constituted a majority community... instead of fighting against the demand for a Muslim Raj you (Nehru) actually abetted the crime of cutting India into two on communal lines... the Hindu Sangathans cannot be terrorized by such carpet Knights... the choice therefore is not between two sets of personalities but between two ideologies, not between Indian Raj and Hindu Raj but between Muslim Raj and Hindu Raj between Akhand Hindustan and Akhand Pakistan..."²

1. *Hindustan Times*, 8 October 1947; *Organiser*, 9 October 1947.

2. *Ibid.*

In the present times, Savarkar's views may appear misplaced. But if we read them in the context of the times and the overall element of suspicion, mistrust, violence and hatred that prevailed in major parts of the country, particularly the north of India among the majority and minority communities, Savarkar was only making a point that was at the time generally accepted among large sections of people. This statement is perhaps Savarkar's most hard hitting in support of the cause he held through his life – a Hindu Raj. A complete version of the statement was published in the *Maratha* (25.9.1947):¹

“As if the mere demand for a Hindu Raj constitutes a danger of his Government so much more imminent, impending and incalculably disastrous as to call for his immediate attention than the already established. Moslem Raj in Pakistan where fanatical atrocities, arson, bloodshed and butchery have been the order of the day... Pandit Nehru and his pseudo-nationalistic section in the Congress are delivering mock heroics against the Hindus and swearing that they will fight tooth and nail against those who demand a Hindu Raj!

Pandit Nehru... forgets that the Hindu Sanghathanists are led by hundreds of those seasoned veterans who had fought in the vanguard of Indian Revolutionist forces against Britain when Gandhiji, speaking politically, was still in his swaddling clothes and the Pandit was not yet born. So many of them defied the sword and the scaffold and the sacrifices and the suffering undergone by each of them in the fight for Indian Independence

1. *Selected Works of Veer Savarkar* (Vol. III) 'Miscellaneous Statements & Writings', pp.536-38.

outweigh the sacrifices of all the Gandhist ministers totaled together. They cannot be terrorized by the threat of such Carpet Knights as the Pandit and his clan...

The demand for a Hindu Raj, these pseudo-nationalists say, is communal, stupid, mediaeval, theocratical, a menace to the progress of mankind itself! ...nevertheless, assuming for the sake of argument that the demand for a Hindu State deserves this condemnation on all these counts, may we ask them was not the demand for a Moslem State at least equally condemnable on these very counts? Did not the Moslems base their claim to own the Pakistani Provinces on ground that the Moslems constituted the major community predominating there? How then that communal claim was respected by you as so fundamentally national as to vivisection our Motherland to make room for an Independent Moslem State? Why did you not refuse to listen to that 'Communal' claim as 'stupid'? Did not the Direct Action the Moslems resorted to prove it to the hilt that the Moslem State they demanded was avowedly theoretical, setting the hands of the clock of Human progress back not only to the 'Mediaeval' but to the bestial age? But instead of fighting against that demand for a Moslem Raj you actually abetted the crime of cutting integrated India right into two pieces directly on communal lines... with what face now can you vilify the demand for a Hindu Raj on these very counts even if it could be said to possess all the above traits?

You contend further on that our country and our state cannot be called Hindustan and a Hindu State as some non-Hindu minorities too

are citizens thereof. But how is it that in spite of the presence of Hindus, Christians, Parsees and other non-Moslem minorities in its territory, all of you and Gandhiji in particular keep 'salaming' saluting the newly carved out Moslem Raj as 'Pakistan' which avowedly and literally means a Holy Moslem Land, a Moslem State? Is it not a fact that almost all states and nations are called after the names of what the League of Nations termed 'National Majority' predominating in each? Nor have you yourselves ever felt any qualm of conscience in recognizing Baluchistan, Vaziristan, Afghanistan, Turkistan or the Turkish State as such in spite of the presence of non-Moslem minorities there?...

...the only reason you have been so emphatically reiterating to defend your recognition of Pakistan as an Independent Moslem Raj in spite of all these objections to it, is to the effect that you were faced with the only alternative 'bloodshed or Pakistan' and so to avoid bloodshed you were persuaded to accept Pakistan. Leaving aside, the fact that such a cowardly reason condemns your action more than defend it, we only ask, do you not thereby insinuate unwillingly enough that if but the Hindus too face you with a similar alternative bloodshed or Hindusthan you will be persuaded to accept Hindusthan too with equal readiness?

The partition of India and its aftermath saw millions of families being uprooted. An estimated 500,000 people lost their lives. Virtually every railway station and town small and big in the Punjab and areas surrounding Delhi was a refugee camp.

THE DEATH OF MAHATMA GANDHI

Savarkar was in his Bombay home ('Savarkar Sadan') when he learnt of the tragedy of Gandhi's death. He was shocked and reacted by saying, "it was bad news". By then a mob had ransacked his brother Dr. Narayan Rao's house and caused serious head injuries to him (Narayan Rao). Savarkar appealed for peace and endorsed the official statement of the Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha, condemning the crime.

The government of India banned the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on 4 February 1948. Close to 25,000 people were rounded-up and arrested across India. Most of these simply for having been associated with these organizations. Savarkar was lodged following his arrest in the Arthur Road jail in Bombay.

Savarkar was listed as accused number 8 in the list of the nine whose names were published in a Gazette notification of 15 May 1948 for the killing of Gandhi. Interestingly at one stage the prosecution was uncertain whether Savarkar was to be tried with the main accused or separately. Savarkar was flown to Delhi on 24 May (1948) accompanied by two doctors and a team of policemen. Incidentally this was the first time he was on a plane. The decision to charge or not charge Savarkar had taken almost three months. 149 prosecution witnesses were examined during the course of the trial.

On 20 November 1948, Savarkar read out a 52 page statement in court in his defence. He said he did not commit any of the offences for which he was charged and had no reason to do so. He narrated his long association with Gandhi, their differences notwithstanding. As he read out the sequence of events of India's partition – the division of the Motherland, tears rolled down his cheeks. He explained how his intention had always been to strengthen the Central Government rather than weaken it and expected the Hindu Mahasabha to help the government to gain its feet in these initial years of freedom. The Mahasabha had welcomed the inclusions of its leader Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee in the Union Cabinet. He drew attention to how over 10,000 documents and letters had been

ceased from his house and not a word was found to link him with the crime. On 10 February 1949 the court pronounced Savarkar as not guilty.¹

A FREE MAN FOR THE SECOND TIME

While declaring Savarkar as not guilty and ordering his release, the court had noted:

“The prosecution against Savarkar rested only the version of the approver – Badge... it is unsafe to base conclusions on his version alone”.

An interesting sequence of events followed. As soon as his release was ordered, the police detained Savarkar under a provision of the Punjab Public Safety Act.² But it appears the government was not quite clear of how it wanted to handle Savarkar. If he was to be detained, obviously it would be in Delhi. On second thoughts, it was decided to send him off to Bombay.

Huge crowds had collected outside the Red Fort trial court premises, waiting for Savarkar. The police managed to secretly, slip him away. He was put on a train for Bombay, and reached the Dadar station on 12 February 1949.

Savarkar was escorted by a team of policemen from Delhi to Bombay. The impression was that he could be attacked enroute. On the contrary at every station there were crowds to receive him. Crowds had gathered all along the route even from the Dadar station to his house.³

When L.B. Bhopatkar, President of the Hindu Mahasabha and Savarkar's defence counsel wanted the Mahasabha to seek answers from the government as to who

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1. Also my *The Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi & The Politics of Banning the RSS*, (Akhil Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana Yojana 2015); also *Sardar Patels Correspondence*, Vol. 6.
 2. *The Tribune*, 11 February, 1949.
 3. *Statesman*, 13 February 1949.

had sanctioned Savarkar's prosecution, Savarkar intervened and suggested that the matter should be forgotten. He believed there could not have been any individually vindictive motive from the government's side.

SARDAR PATEL ON SAVARKAR'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIME

It may be interesting to know that an exchange of letters had in fact taken place between Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who was then a Minister in the Nehru Cabinet and Home Minister Sardar Patel at about the time that the charge sheet for the Mahatma Gandhi murder case was being prepared.

...My dear Sardarji, ...I wrote to you (and also spoke to Shankar, Patel's Private Secretary)... I understand (V.D.) Savarkar's name is being mentioned in this connection. I do not know what evidence has been found against him. I have not the least doubt that you will satisfy yourself that nothing is done which may give rise to the suggestion later on that he was being prosecuted on account of his political convictions... His sacrifice and suffering in the past have been considerable and unless there is some positive proof against him, he should not, at this age, be subjected to a charge of conspiracy to commit murder. I leave the matter to your decision...¹

The Sardar replied to Dr. Mookerjee on 6 May 1948:

My dear Syama Prasad, ...as regards Savarkar, the Advocate-General of Bombay, who is in charge of the case, and other legal advisers and investigating officers met me at a conference in Delhi before I came here. I told them, quite clearly, that the question of inclusion of Savarkar must be approached purely from a

1. *Sardar Patels Correspondence*, Vol. 6, pp.63-64.

legal and judicial and political considerations should not be imported into the matter. My instructions were quite definite and beyond doubt and I am sure they will be acted up to. I have also told them that, if they come to the view that Savarkar should be included, the papers should be placed before me, before action is taken...¹

It is clear that Patel was treading carefully on the question of charging or not charging of Savarkar for involvement in the crime. But for records that are still inaccessible, it is not clear as to who actually sanctioned the prosecution of Savarkar and the inclusion of his name in the charge sheet. Was it as Dr. Mookerjee suspected, a political decision?

With the closure of the Mahatma Gandhi murder trial and the acquittal of Savarkar, in a way Sardar Patel the Union Home Minister found his stand vindicated. With regard to the large scale arrests of the RSS volunteers, Patel made a statement in the Lok Sabha explaining the government's policy with regard to the RSS. He said that all students except the very active in the RSS were being released. Those below 19 years of age were to be released without a written guarantee. He also told the House that in provinces controlled by the Centre, 2200 RSS volunteers had been arrested, 185 detained and 1845 were convicted.²

In the months that followed Savarkar remained in touch with his old friends, including the firebrand Akali leader Master Tara Singh. A family tragedy struck Savarkar in October 1949. His younger brother (Dr. Narayan Rao) passed away. Many said he had never been able to recover from the shock of the mob attack in February 1948.

The Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS that had been

1. *Sardar Patels Correspondence*, Vol. 6, pp.65-66.

2. *Statesman*, 15 February, 1949.

banned were once again free. Savarkar attended the Mahasabha session in Calcutta (December 1949), where he was welcomed in an unprecedented way. Virtually every address of Savarkar of the time shows that he was unable to accept the partition of India and that Pakistan had to be formed by dividing India.

ARRESTED YET AGAIN

In March 1950, there were wide spread communal riots in East Bengal. At about the same time (April) Savarkar was to attend the East Punjab Hindu Conference at Rohtak. Just then Pakistan's Prime Minister issued a statement that the Hindu Mahasabha had a hand in the riots. As all this blame and counter blame was taking place, the Prime Ministers of both India and Pakistan decided to meet and discuss some unresolved partition issues. For reasons that remain unexplained even to date, on 4 April 1950 Savarkar was arrested under the Preventive Detention Act. The *Free Press Journal*, no friend of the Hindu Mahasabha noted: "The offensive against the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS leaders has only one implication. ...Premier Nehru has elected to appease Pakistan... has a two fold purpose: one is to divert India's attention from the policy of appeasement the other to create panic that there is a Hindu conspiracy and rally (progressive) elements in support of the policy of appeasement..."¹

The Tribune, which was highly regarded even by Gandhi for its role in the freedom struggle days commented at length on the issue. It noted, "The long drawn Indo-Pak crisis reached a turning point this week... Prime Minister of India Nehru and the Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali are meeting..." It also said that to set the right environment for the meet, Nehru had assured the Pakistan Prime Minister that he would take stern action against the 'wrong doers'.² The paper

1. *Free Press Journal*, 5 April, 1950.

2. *The Tribune*, 1st April, 1950.

went a step further and noted that Liaquat Ali had probably forgotten the large scale massacre of Hindus in West Punjab.¹

Not surprisingly a day before Liaquat Ali was to arrive in New Delhi, five senior Hindu Mahasabha leaders including its president Dr. N.B. Khare were expelled from Delhi and taken to Nagpur.² This was the background in which Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee resigned as a Minister from the Government of India (4th April 1950). Savarkar, who was in Bombay was also arrested the same day. The Hindu Mahasabha's senior leader and the organization's former President Bhopatkar were also arrested at the same time in Poona. Savarkar, was charged for inciting Hindus against Muslims.

On the basis of an habeas corpus petition and an undertaking filed on his behalf by his council Savarkar was released on 13 July 1950. The frivolous ground on which both Bhopatkar and Savarkar were arrested was noted even by the Bombay High Court. In the case of Bhopatkar and G.V. Ketkar editor of *Kesari* the Court said, "The District Magistrate Poona's orders are vague..."³

In the case of Savarkar, who was already 70 years of age and was not keeping well, the court ordered his release and sought an undertaking that he would not leave Poona and would stay away from political activities.⁴ The restrictions on Savarkar's movement were lifted a year later (July 1951).

We have already seen of how even when Savarkar was acquitted in the Gandhi murder case the government was unsure of how to handle him. In fact the arrest of Savarkar in 1950 was yet another example of how Savarkar was seen as a continuous threat. This understanding of Savarkar by the government was obviously misplaced. The Hindu Mahasabha

1. *The Tribune*, 1st April, 1950.

2. *Ibid*, 2nd April, 1950.

3. *Ibid*, 13 July, 1950.

4. *Ibid*.

and even Savarkar with all the respect and regard they may have enjoyed countrywide were both in no position to actually cause at the time (1950s) any major political damage to the Congress. It was perhaps at the level of some leaders that the threat perception appears to have prevailed.

WITHDRAWS TO HIMSELF

As time passed Savarkar remained the focal point of political decision making and guidance among forces devoted to the cause for which he had struggled through his life. Leaders of national standing were regular visitors. On 26 August 1952, Dr. Syama Prasad visited him to seek his blessings for the newly founded Jan Sangh. Savarkar had also by now started delivering lectures, which were widely applauded. The theme usually was Indian and world history. Savarkar had also at around this time started collecting funds for a memorial he was keen to dedicate to the revolutionaries who had sacrificed their lives for India's freedom. The memorial was inaugurated on 10 May 1953 in Nashik.

Long years of suffering and torturous prison life had taken their toll on Savarkar's health. Unlike his younger days, he was no longer able to create the kind of accessibility and warmth required from a man of his stature. He was now often moody and frequently lost himself in deep thought. When people came to meet him and interview him, often from across the world, he often showed little interest.

As early as in 1945 when he was unable to attend a Hindu Mahasabha meeting in Calcutta in a telegram he told N.C. Chatterjee: "can not attend, my nerve system has been totally shattered..."¹

Why did a firebrand man like him withdraw into a kind of shell – disconnected. One possible, perhaps even an obvious reason could be the way things were turning out. He looked on helplessly. Corruption in public life was

1. Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 29, R-6456, Telegram dated 5 December 1945 (NMML).

commonplace. Appeasement for vote bank politics was now a norm and practice rather than an exception. Caste and community considerations had become the very essence of political life. Savarkar as we have seen had struggled through his life to keep India free of these ills.

His isolation in fact had grown over the years. He had always lived a simple, spartan life. Many of the visitors, who had the chance to meet him came back shocked, seeing the simplicity of his life. He did not for example have special likes or dislikes in food – he liked fish and chicken and occasionally a very small quantity of whiskey a habit he had picked up in Europe. He was not a music man, but at times would hum a tune or one of his poems. What he loved of course was reading.

He was very particular with regard to appointments for meeting him. Even very important people often had to return without being able to see him if they had taken the chance of coming without a prior appointment. He was unable to indulge in the kind of time passing gossip, so common among people in public life. A very peculiar trait that remained with him through his life was his love for detail. He was meticulous almost to a fault. He had the habit of underlining important lines of what he wrote. He retained not only the old and life long habit of reading but also of replying to letters very carefully. What he hated perhaps the most was the seeking of publicity, pretensions and playing to the public, so common among political leaders.

Savarkar remained committed in these last years to the eradication of untouchability. He was among the strongest supporters of seeking stringent laws and enforcement to eradicate untouchability. When his advice was sought by a member of the Backward Classes Commission (1954), he suggested exemplary punishments for those, who indulged in or encouraged caste divisions. 1956 was the Birth Centenary of his idol Lokmanya Tilak. He was the key speaker at a mammoth rally organized on the occasion in Poona. He was sad however that the main event for such a historic occasion was not organized in Delhi.

CENTENARY OF 1857

1957 was the centenary year of the great anti British uprising. Savarkar on 12 May 1957 had come to Delhi for the first time as a free citizen in free India. He was taken to the venue in a huge procession through parts of old Delhi.

Interestingly the organizers had approached Prime Minister Nehru to attend the function. Nehru is said to have politely declined saying that he had respect for Savarkar, who was a brave man, a great man. He said he had his differences with Savarkar and therefore it would be embarrassing for both – him and Savarkar to speak from the same stage. Savarkar was not surprised by the Prime Minister's reaction. By now Savarkar was a greatly mellowed man, yet the content of his public addresses was as hard hitting as ever. He continued to believe to his last days that the Congress by yielding to the demand for partition had done irreparable harm to the country. And this he believed was something that the people would realize only with time.

Savarkar in spite of very poor health continued attending public functions organized in his honour. These included the celebration of his 75th birth anniversary (May 1958). He was unable to attend the convocation organized by Poona University to confer on him a Doctor of Letters (Honoris Causa) in October 1959. Nagpur University had already conferred a similar degree earlier.

THE LAST YEARS

By 1962, Savarkar was completely confined to bed so ill was he that in spite of earnestly wanting to accept the invitation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Chief, M.S. Golwalkar to attend a function organized in connection with the memorial dedicated to the Sangh's founder Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, Savarkar was unable to do so.

The Chinese attack on India (1962) shocked him. Even more because he was like Dr. Ambedkar among the few who had all along been predicting this eventuality. His biographer Keer, who had been in frequent touch with Savarkar at the time

notes that, in December 1962, as news of the huge military setback against China was received by the nation, Savarkar wept for over an hour.¹ On 8 November 1963, Savarkar lost his wife. It was a huge emotional blow.

It may come as a surprise to leaders of our present times that Savarkar had lived a life of spartan and limited means and in the last years of his life, he was not financially comfortable. The government of Maharashtra in fact had to provide his family a monthly stipend of Rs.300/- per month from October 1964 onwards. Most of his property confiscated by the British had still not been returned. So much so that the young Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then a Member of Parliament had to strongly urge the government to return his property, that was confiscated by the British in 1910-11.

By the beginning of 1965, it seems nature was ensuring that Savarkar lived to see yet another of his prophetic warnings come true. He had seen China's attack, and now it was Pakistan (Sept. 1965). Fortunately, the story was now different. Under Lal Bahadur Shastri a befitting reply had been given to the enemy. When it came to the 'Motherland's' defence, for Savarkar there was to be no compromise. He admired Shastri for his tough reaction.

Savarkar's health started to decline rapidly from about the beginning of February 1966. As the word spread of his health, large crowds began to gather in front of Savarkar Sadan. Visitors included - Ministers, Legislators, men & women from business and of course those who had known him over the years. The place had become almost a pilgrimage centre for people from across Maharashtra. Union Home Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda seems to have learnt that the Savarkar family was having financial problems. Nanda arranged for a sum of Rs.1000/- to be sent to the family for Savarkar's medical care. This sum was disbursed to the family in installments. This small incident is important to understand

1. Keer, *Savarkar*, p.526.

the very high level of integrity that Savarkar had set for himself in public life.

Savarkar had written his will sometime in 1964. On his death (26 February 1966) parts of the will were made public by The Tribune. Here too his completely rationalist process of thought comes forth. He noted instructions that no one was to close his business or cause an hartal or cause inconvenience to people to mourn his death. He gave instructions to be cremated in an electric crematorium without any fuss and rituals. At most some Vedic Mantras could be recited. He said there was to be no 'Pind Daan' and his body was to be transported for cremation in a motor transport in a process as simple as possible. Such was this man.

Savarkar death took place at 11 a.m., 26 February 1966. He was 83. More than 200,000 people are reported to have filed past the body. A large number of leaders cutting across ideological lines paid profuse tribute.

These included President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

"...one of the earliest revolutionaries. A steady and sturdy worker for the Independence of India – his life and career are legendry..."¹

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in her message said:

"...his death removes from our midst a great figure of contemporary India... a byword for patriotism and daring... cast in the mould of a classical revolutionary... countless people drew inspiration from him..."²

Defence Minister Y.B. Chavan noted:

"The country has lost one of its greatest freedom fighters, a man who defied British rule and underwent great suffering for his country..."³

1. *The Tribune*, 27 February 1966.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh *Sarsanghachalak* (Chief) M.S. Golwalkar was in Madurai on the day of Savarkar's death. In his statement released to the press, Golwalkar said:

"With Savarkar's death the stormy life of a relentless freedom fighter has concluded... Death has put its seal on an extraordinary life, may his life of suffering and sacrifice be an eternal source of inspiration..."¹

The Times of India in an editorial noted:

"Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was a rebel and a revolutionary till his last breath. He relished controversy, which he enlivened with his glowing patriotism and sense of dedication. History will salute him as a remarkable Indian, a man whose faith in the destiny of his country remained undiminished till the end despite so many vicissitudes. His life reads like a legend. He matched his words with deeds. That is why the British Raj never took kindly to him... most noteworthy contribution to Indian political thinking was his emphasis on the defence of the country's frontiers... His dauntless spirit will stir generations to come".²

The Organiser:

"Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is no more, a titan ... has passed away... thousands of people stood though scorching Sun and the night, more than one lac people from all walks of life joined the funeral procession (ironically) not a single minister was present. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh gave him

1. *The Tribune*, 28 February 1966.

2. Cited, Keer, *Savarkar*, p.546.

the last *Pranam* at a solemn ceremony near Bombay Central Station as thunderous slogans of 'Janta ka Bharat Ratana' 'amar rahe'. It was the common man's way of telling the Delhi Mughals of what they thought of Savarkar and what they thought of the Government..."¹

As I was thinking over how to end this small introduction to such a great man, I chanced upon a letter written by Savarkar to one Shripat Babarao Khaparde of Amravati. The microfilm was barely readable. The content of the letter written on 24 November 1944 truly reflect on the level of Savarkar's commitment to the cause of India's freedom as also on his perception of life, death and the freedom of the soul. Khaparde, probably a friend and functionary of the Hindu Mahasabha appears to have told Savarkar that he was tired after a long tour working for the Mahasabha.

"You seem to have been tired by your tours... but this spirit is stronger than the flesh and at times I think that when we shall be physically not only exhausted but extinguished and lie stretched on the last of our bedding even then fire will not go out but will rise up in conflagration as it never did in our life. A Hindu even after his death rises in flames of spirit, so no question of leaving work our life's mission..."²



1. *Organiser*, 6 March 1966.

2. Private Papers of V.D. Savarkar, Reel No. 29, R-6456 (NMML).